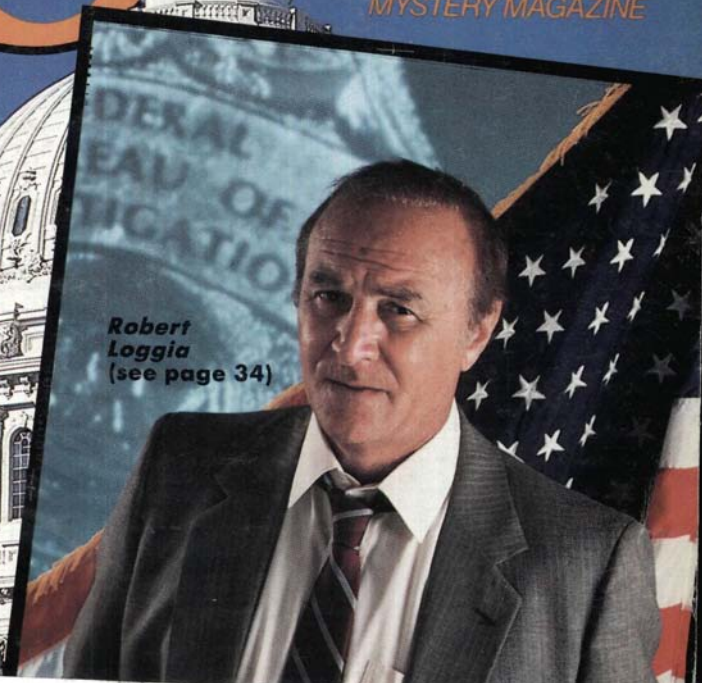
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

10 CAPITAL STORIES

Clark Howard

Ruth Rendell



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(see page 34)

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1990
$2.25 U.S.
$2.75 CAN.

10 CAPITAL STORIES

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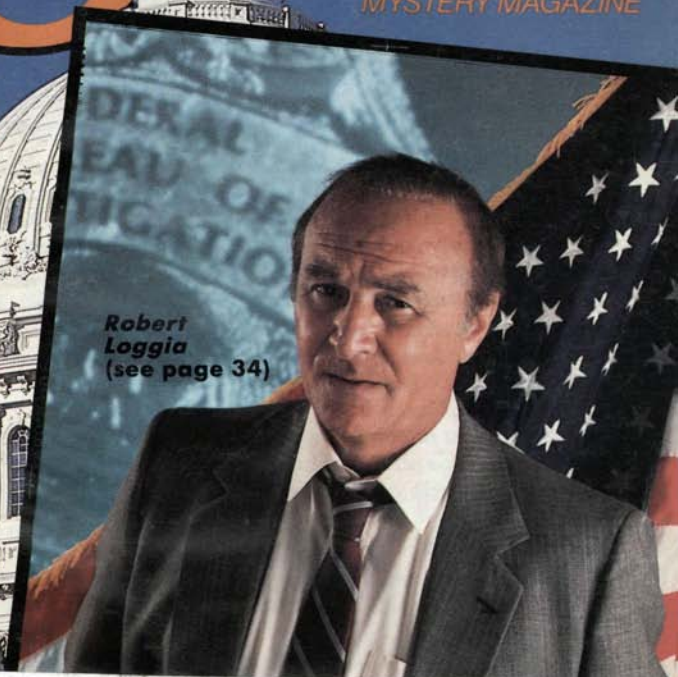

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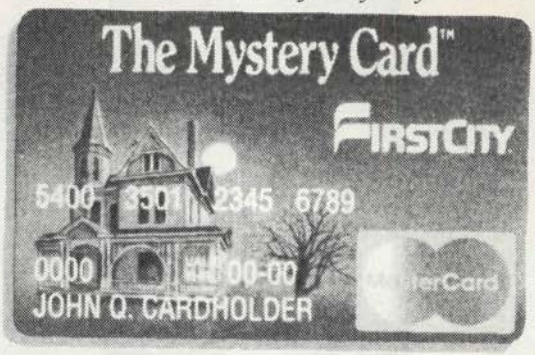

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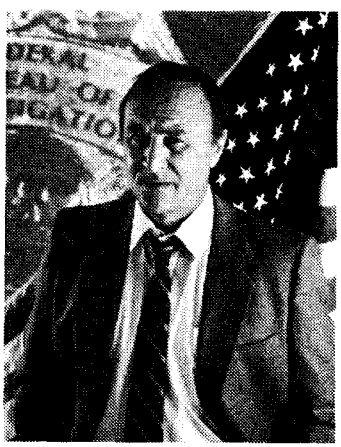

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

When they reached Foxhart shortly before noon, Rand found the traffic being diverted onto a grassy field. A local constable seemed to have things well under control and directed them down a path toward a little stream that was the central attraction. The path itself was crowded with people moving in both directions, some reverently silent while others laughed and chatted like typical tourists.

The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories 1989, *edited by Edward D. Hoch, is now available from Walker . . .*

THE SPY AND THE HEALING WATERS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

When Hastings retired from British Intelligence and moved to Scotland, Rand and his wife Leila had promised to visit him. Thinking about it now, Rand was somewhat ashamed to realize that three months had passed with no attempt to make good on the promise. He turned to Leila one evening after dinner and said, "The weather's supposed to be good this weekend. What say we drive up to Scotland and see old Hastings?"

She put down the archaeology text she was reading and said, "I never thought you'd bring yourself to it."

"I know I've been dragging my feet," Rand admitted. "I'm afraid of what this retirement might have done to him."

Months earlier, Hastings had come under suspicion as a traitor, a Russian mole operating at the highest levels of M.I.6. Rand had been instrumental in clearing his name, but the ordeal had been too

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much for his former superior. Even though there had been apologies all around, Hastings felt he could never again do an effective job. He'd called it quits and retired to a little holiday home he'd maintained east of Edinburgh along the Firth of Forth.

"He must be very lonely up there," Leila speculated. "It's too bad he never married."

"I think he did, in his university days, but it was short-lived. Ever since I knew him, he devoted himself entirely to his work. When I was heading up Concealed Communications, he took an almost daily interest in the department, even though it was only one of his many responsibilities."

And so it was that Rand and Leila set out for the east coast of Scotland on a Friday morning in May.

They'd phoned Hastings to tell him they were coming, and he had obviously been watching out the window of his cottage. He came out as they turned the car in the gravel driveway, smiling and extending a hand of greeting. "So good of you both to drive all the way up here!"

He had aged in the three months since his retirement, Rand noticed. He walked a little slower and watched the ground, as if fearful of a tumble. In his office overlooking the Thames, he'd always been sure of himself.

"It's a lovely house," Leila marveled as he showed them through the four small rooms.

"Small, though. Very small."

"It's all the space you need."

"Well," Hastings replied, "I have my books, and all my fishing gear. The fishing has always been a delight around here. And my niece in Edinburgh drives out to see me every couple of weeks. It's not a bad life."

Leila had promised during the drive up that she'd be bright and cheerful the whole time of their visit, even though she'd grown to resent Hastings in the years before his retirement. "At least he won't be calling on you with his problems two or three times a year now," she'd said.

"No, those days are over." Rand was surprised that the thought made him a little sad, not only for Hastings but for himself.

Now, seeing Hastings here in his retirement cottage, he felt a little better. His former superior went on about the region at some length, and it was only when Leila went off to use the bathroom

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that he asked, "Have you been in the Double-C or the other departments since my departure?"

"No, I've had nothing to do with any of them."

"I thought Parkinson might ask you for help."

"He never did before," Rand told him. "You're the only one I ever did work for." Parkinson, who'd moved up to Director of Concealed Communications when Rand retired more than a decade ago, was a by-the-books professional who rarely asked help from anyone. Rand couldn't entirely dislike him, though. It was Parkinson who'd tipped him off that Hastings had been taken to a safe house for questioning on suspicion of treason.

Hastings sighed and gazed out at the water, perhaps following the progress of a large yacht under full sail. "I guess we're both retired, then, after all these years."

"No shop talk," Leila cautioned, returning in time to overhear. "Have you decided how to entertain us for the weekend?" she asked their host.

Hastings took on an impish expression Rand hadn't seen in years. "We might drive over to Foxhart tomorrow. It's not far and there's a rather strange phenomenon there—a spring whose waters are said to heal the infirm."

"You sound like a non-believer."

"Well, I think I'll reserve judgment until I see it. But I don't believe the priests at Lourdes need worry about competition from Foxhart quite yet."

Leila and Rand slept well in the big double bed in the guestroom. Hastings himself prepared breakfast, seeming more relaxed than he had the day before. Then they set off for Foxhart in Rand's car and Hastings warned, "I understood it's crowded on weekends, even though there's been little national publicity about it so far."

"If it's too crowded, we can drive down along the coast," Leila suggested.

When they reached Foxhart shortly before noon, Rand found the traffic being diverted onto a grassy field. A local constable seemed to have things well under control and directed them down a path toward the little stream that was the central attraction. The path itself was crowded with people moving in both directions, some reverently silent while others laughed and chatted like typical tourists. Foxhart was just another stop to them.

At the stream itself, Rand was surprised to see a tall, dark-haired

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man in clerical garb facing people like some sort of tour guide. "Come, place your hands in this healing water," he told them. "The miracle has happened once, it can happen again. Don't be afraid. Here, Granny, let me give you a hand."

"Is he real?" Leila whispered in Rand's ear.

"Let's see if he takes up a collection."

Most of the people did dip their hands into the swiftly flowing stream, and one elderly man even took off his shoes and socks to immerse his feet. The clergyman spoke again. "I'm the Reverend Joshua Fowler. As you leave, you will note that bottles of the healing water are available for your purchase. All monies raised through their sale goes to continue the Lord's work. Thank you, thank you. Please keep moving. There are other pilgrims anxious to bathe in these waters."

Rand saw that Hastings was no longer looking at the cleric—his gaze had shifted to an attractive woman standing near the edge of the crowd. She wore a fashionable tan raincoat and a scarf to protect her brown hair from the breeze. She was tall, probably in her mid-thirties. Rand judged her to be a business type and wondered what had brought her to this place. Hastings must have wondered, too, because he suddenly left Rand's side and edged his way through the crowd toward her. Rand followed along.

"Hello, Karen," Hastings said as he reached her.

She glanced at him and said, "My name is Monica. You must be mistaking me for someone else." She spoke with a strong American accent.

Hastings hesitated and then tipped the plaid cap he was wearing. "I'm sorry. You looked just like her."

She edged away from them and hurried back up the path to the parking lot. "Who did you think she was?" Rand asked.

"A young woman I met in London last year. Karen Hayes."

"But you were wrong."

"No."

"She's one of ours?"

"CIA, actually. One of their specialists."

"Oh?"

Leila joined them. "What are you up to, huddled here like a pair of thieves? Are you plotting to steal the receipts from the sale of the healing water?"

"Hastings thought he saw someone he knew," Rand explained.

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"I'm sorry I dragged you out here," Hastings murmured apologetically. "There wasn't really much to see. Shall we be on our way?"

They were passing a small glass-enclosed concession stand when Leila decided she wanted a souvenir. "I'll catch up with you," she said.

"Just don't bring back a bottle of water," Rand told her.

He and Hastings strolled on toward the parking lot, where a minor traffic jam seemed to have developed. "I suppose she might be on assignment," Hastings said, thinking aloud.

"What?"

"That woman we saw. Karen Hayes."

"You miss the job, don't you?"

"Didn't you, when you retired from Double-C?"

"Well, I had Leila, and I did some writing. And of course you kept me busy over the years."

"I'm not lonely, Rand, if that's what you mean. I just miss knowing what's going on from day to day."

"Surely you could have stayed on. After all their mistaken accusations, they could hardly have forced you out."

"I didn't feel comfortable being back. Parkinson and the others were most friendly and solicitous, but there was something in their eyes that hadn't been there before. I was only two years away from mandatory retirement, anyway, and I found that I could leave now with severance pay and my full pension rights. It seemed the wise thing to do."

Leila came running up the path to join them, carrying a small plastic bag. "The water is three pounds a bottle—can you believe that? I settled for a laminated color photo of the stream with the Reverend Fowler standing beside it."

"I hope you're not planning to hang it in our living room," Rand laughed.

A number of cars were lined up in the car park, attempting to get out. Rand heard the constable blowing his whistle, and then he heard another sound off to his left of almost the same pitch.

It was a woman screaming.

They reached her at the same time as several others. She was a grey-haired woman who looked like somebody's mother. At her feet lay sprawled a woman in a tan raincoat. Blood was soaking through the coat from an unseen wound.

It was the woman Hastings had identified as Karen Hayes and there was no doubt in Rand's experienced eye that she was dead . . .

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Neither Rand nor Hastings had been in a line of work where one volunteered information to the police, so they remained on the sidelines during the brief turmoil that followed. Constable Stebbins, the officer who'd been directing traffic in the parking lot, pulled back the raincoat enough to reveal a wound just beneath the left breast. Then he hurried to his patrol car to summon reinforcements on the police radio.

"Keep back, everyone," he urged, using his traffic baton as an extender for his widespread arms. "There's nothing to see here. Keep moving, please!"

Leila tugged on Rand's sleeve. "We don't need to get involved in this, do we?"

"Hastings thinks he knows her," he replied quietly. "Let's just wait until the investigating team arrives."

The Reverend Joshua Fowler had been drawn to the scene by that time and was exhorting the faithful to remain calm. "A woman has been struck down in the prime of her life! Join me in a prayer for her, and a prayer for her attacker, that the Lord might show him some of the mercy that he denied his victim."

Rand took Hastings aside. "You said she was a CIA specialist. What was her field?"

"If that was Karen Hayes, as I believe, she was a disguise technician. Washington loaned her to us last year to help with a particular operation. I assumed she'd gone back by now."

"What sort of operation?"

"That's top secret, Rand."

Their conversation was cut short by the arrival of two police cars. If Rand had expected them to remain on the sidelines, he was mistaken.

The first detective out of the unmarked second car spotted Hastings at once and headed straight for him. "Well, Mr. Hastings, are you involved in this?"

"Not at all," Hastings said. "I'm just showing some friends some of our tourist spots. Jeffrey and Leila, this is Detective Sergeant Scott Winston."

Winston and Rand shook hands and Winston told Hastings, "Stay around. I'll want to see you later about this business." Then he hurried off to the dead woman.

"Now what?" Leila asked.

Hastings said, "I've known Sergeant Winston for as long as I've had my house. I'd see him when I came here to fish. He's a good sort.

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And this will probably become his case unless he has to ask for help."

"Don't the local police usually summon Scotland Yard for help in murder cases?" Leila looked toward where the police were grouped around the body. "I assume she didn't commit suicide."

"Despite its name," Hastings explained, "Scotland Yard's jurisdiction doesn't normally extend to Scotland. The Scottish courts and legal system are quite separate from ours."

Rand observed that the Reverend Fowler was deep in conversation with Sergeant Winston, gesturing with both hands as he spoke. Perhaps he was disturbed about the business he was losing. "Tell me some more about this place," he urged Hastings. "And about Fowler."

"Well, this is my first visit, of course, but I've read about it in the local papers. It seems that Fowler leased this property from the owner about a year ago. Within months, a young woman who'd been crippled for years because of a hip problem claimed she'd been cured by daily bathing in the stream. This was followed by an elderly man reporting that his arthritis had been cured. That was when Fowler started building the souvenir stand and bottling the water."

"The world is full of charlatans," Rand observed. "What would bring a CIA technician to this place?" he wondered.

"I can't imagine."

Leila, who had been listening enough to grasp the flow of their conversation, suggested, "Perhaps she had a tennis elbow or some such thing—she might have come for the waters herself."

"Then why deny her identity when I greeted her?" Hastings asked.

Leila shrugged. "She was embarrassed," she suggested. "Or you were mistaken."

Sergeant Winston sent the constable to summon them as the body was being removed. "Never had anything like this in Foxhart," Constable Stebbins grumbled. "I've lived here all my forty years and I told them when the tourists started coming in to see the waters that there'd be trouble of some sort. Any time you get this many people, you get trouble."

There was no disagreeing with that, and Winston's refrain was not much different. "It's people from the city who commit these crimes," he declared. "Country people would never stick a stranger with a knife for no reason at all."

"How do you know it was for no reason?" Hastings asked.

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"The woman was an American, traveling alone. We've located her rented vehicle in the car park. Apparently she's been touring England and Scotland, judging by the route maps spread out on the passenger seat. She just arrived here this morning. In her bag we found a hotel bill for a single room in Edinburgh last night."

Rand mused. "She was alone at the hotel, and the maps on the passenger seat indicate she was alone in the car as well."

"Exactly," the sergeant confirmed. "A stranger in a strange land, and someone killed her."

"What sort of weapon?" Hastings asked.

"A dagger with a very thin blade, I'd guess. We'll know more after the autopsy. Now tell me what you saw."

"Nothing, really. I had noticed the woman earlier, down by the stream. I suppose she caught my eye because she was younger and healthier than most of the other visitors."

"Did any of you notice someone watching or following her?"

"No," Hastings said. Rand could read in his troubled face the realization that his speaking to Karen Hayes, and calling her by name, might have caused her death.

"What about this man Fowler? Do you know anything about him?"

"Not a thing, except what little I've read in the newspapers about the cures."

"Yes," Sergeant Winston muttered. "Well, he didn't cure *this* woman."

As they were leaving, Rand asked the detective, "Has she been identified yet?"

"She was carrying quite a bit of identification, including an American passport in the name of Monica Camber, and an M.I.5 courtesy card—the sort they issue people on special duty involving travel."

"Interesting," Rand murmured.

Driving back to Hastings' cottage, Rand said, "Perhaps you were wrong. She said her name was Monica, not Karen. She might have been telling the truth. I read once that everyone in the world has a double. This might have been Karen Hayes' double."

"If she was an innocent American tourist, why was she killed?"

"A random act of violence, just as the police believe."

"Hogwash!" Hastings exploded. "I just keep fearing it was my fault that she died."

"Then you're certain it was this Karen Hayes."

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"As certain as I've ever been of anything. I spent two entire days with the woman just last year, and I have a very good memory."

"What are you going to do?"

Hastings sighed, as Rand had heard him do so many times in the midst of a particularly troublesome operation. "I suppose I should tell London, pass the word on to the Americans."

"It's none of your affair any more," Rand reminded him.

"The woman is dead, Jeffrey! Someone cares about her—not just the people who employed her but her family and friends!"

"She'll be identified through that M.I.5 travel card."

Hastings was silent for a moment and then he said, "No, I have to tell them now. Otherwise they won't know before Monday."

When they arrived at the cottage, he went directly to the telephone. Rand knew he was dialing a private number of London Central, one that would be manned even on weekends. When he came back to them he said, "Well, I left a top-priority message for Parkinson. It's not Double-C's responsibility, but he's always been decent to me."

They waited, expecting the telephone to ring at any moment, but no call came. Finally Leila walked to the window and stared out at the lush green countryside. "It's so lovely, so peaceful. Why would the CIA have any interest here?"

"I can't imagine," Hastings said. "There's an inactive RAF base near here, but it was mothballed years ago. It's not likely to reopen, either, with peace breaking out across Europe. The cold war is over."

"And the spies are all out of work," Rand said with a smile.

"It's no joke. You know how much of our work has already been taken over by spy satellites, and even those may become obsolete if Russia becomes a completely open society."

"There'll always be spies, Hastings. There'll be little wars and government-backed terrorism."

Leila was growing restless. Her dark hair had streaks of grey in it now, but she was still as lovely as when Rand had first met her down along the Nile River at the height of the cold war, when Russian troops were actually based in Egypt. He remembered his first sight of the high-cheekboned beauty of her face.

"Well, the healing waters were certainly exciting," she told Hastings. "What have you got to show us next?"

"Would you care for a bite to eat? It's still several hours till dinner."

They agreed on a sandwich, and then a drive into Edinburgh for

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dinner at a restaurant Hastings favored. On the way they could stop at Inveresk Lodge, a tourist attraction Hastings thought they would enjoy.

As it turned out, their plans were due for a change. They were walking out to the car when a black sedan pulled up in front of the cottage. Rand recognized Parkinson at once, accompanied by a slightly overweight American he'd never seen before. "Glad we caught you!" Parkinson said. "Flew up as soon as I received your message, Hastings. Mr. Camber here is quite concerned about his daughter."

So it's to be more games, Rand decided. The Americans loved games, but no more so than the British. "My name is Rand, Mr. Camber," he introduced himself. "Haven't we met before?"

The American frowned at Rand. "I don't believe so, unless it was back in Richmond. I'm Hugh Camber, Monica's father. I have a construction business back there."

"You spoke with his daughter?" Parkinson asked Hastings.

Rand and Leila both looked at Hastings, who gave one of his sighs and said, "I think we'd better go back indoors."

When they were seated in Hastings' cramped living room, he looked at Camber and said, "The woman I saw this morning at Foxhart was Karen Hayes, a CIA technician. She was not a field operative and to my knowledge never had been. She was a sweet young woman with a particular talent for disguises. Whoever sent her to Foxhart sent her to her death. Which of you is prepared to take responsibility for that?"

The American shifted uneasily. "I think you must be mistaken—"

"Like hell I'm mistaken. You're CIA and everyone in this room knows it. Parkinson here doesn't sacrifice his weekend at home to fly to Scotland with a worried father searching for his daughter."

The man who'd been Hugh Camber got to his feet. "Just tell us what you know, please," he said, his voice softening a bit.

"What's your name?"

"Camber is good enough. Tell me."

Hastings seemed to make a decision. He nodded and started talking, telling them everything that had happened. When he finished, Rand took over. "Now it's your turn, Mr. Camber."

The American gave him a suspicious look. "Does this man have clearance?"

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"He was my predecessor at Double-C," Parkinson explained. "I'll vouch for him."

"And the woman, too?"

Leila rose to leave but Rand waved her back to her chair. "My wife stays."

Camber decided not to press the point. "Very well. Does the name Oleg Penkov mean anything to you?"

Rand had been gone too long for the name to register, but Hastings immediately said, "The Limping Man."

"Exactly. And an expert with makeup. They say he can disguise everything but his limp." He showed them a photo of a white-haired man.

"He was at Foxhart?"

"We believe he came to London two weeks ago on some sort of mission."

Rand interrupted. "I thought the cold war was ending. Why would Moscow send someone here?"

"It's not ending as far as industrial espionage goes. They want every secret they can put their hands on."

"Not much industry or espionage in Foxhart," Hastings observed drily.

Camber ignored him and went on. "We brought over Miss—"

"Hayes."

"Well, yes. Miss Hayes was a better disguise technician than anyone London could supply. She knew what to look for, and we felt sure she'd see through Penkov's makeup even if he dressed himself as an old lady. She's been on his tail for the past ten days, ever since he left London."

"Making contacts?"

"Yes. A schoolteacher in Bath, a magistrate in Newcastle, a postman in Blackpool. No one of obvious importance, and no one on any list of suspected agents."

"Perhaps he's selling magazine subscriptions," Rand suggested.

Camber glanced at him distastefully. "Please, Mr. Rand."

"Sorry."

"She called London early this morning and told us she was in Foxhart. Penkov seemed interested in the healing waters here, and she was certain he would make another contact. That's the last we heard."

"When I spoke to her," Hastings said, "I called her by name. It may have blown her cover."

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Parkinson thought about it. "I doubt if her name would have meant anything to Penkov—unless she was known to the person he came here to contact."

"But she was dead within minutes."

"A coincidence, possibly," Hugh Camber reassured him.

Still, Rand could see that Hastings was deeply bothered by it. The thought that he might have been responsible for the woman's death, however inadvertently, was beginning to haunt him. "She wasn't an agent, you know," Hastings argued, more to himself than to the others. "I had no reason to believe she might be up here doing field work—and at the Reverend Fowler's healing waters, of all places."

"It's all a bit bizarre," Camber agreed.

Parkinson went to the telephone. "They promised they'd have a preliminary autopsy report by now. Mind if I use your phone?"

"Go ahead."

Parkinson spoke briskly to someone at the other end, asked one or two questions, and then hung up. He returned to report, "Karen Hayes was killed by a single stab wound with a thin-bladed weapon. It penetrated to a depth of about seven inches, going straight to the heart. She died within seconds."

"A thin-bladed weapon," Rand repeated. "And what's the one fact we know about Oleg Penkov's appearance? The single thing he couldn't disguise?"

"His limp," Leila said.

Rand nodded. "If he limps, he probably uses a cane. And that suggests a sword cane."

Parkinson shrugged. "He's probably on his way back to Moscow by now, complete with sword cane."

"Not necessarily," Rand argued. "The limp makes identification fairly easy, especially if he's trying to flee. I'm sure that helped Miss Hayes a great deal while she was on his trail. The safest place for him might be right here in Foxhart, at Fowler's miraculous stream."

"You think he'd return there?" Camber asked.

"Perhaps he never left."

It was after six when they returned to the site of the waters, but this far north in late May there were still hours of daylight remaining. The crowd at the wooded stream seemed even larger than before, swelled no doubt with curiosity-seekers attracted by the news of the killing. The two teenagers working the concession stand were selling bottles of the healing water as fast as they could ring up

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sales on the cash registers, and Constable Stebbins was doing his best to keep the traffic flowing, jabbing his baton first one way and then another. As they entered the grounds, they spotted Joshua Fowler on the path leading to the stream.

"We'd like to ask you a few questions," Parkinson told him. At Rand's side, Leila was scanning faces as they passed by, searching for someone she might remember from earlier.

"I've already talked with the local police," Fowler said, recognizing them as strangers up from the south. Unfamiliar with jurisdictions, he might have mistaken them for Scotland Yard investigators. "I have nothing more to contribute."

"It's not directly about the killing," Rand explained. "You've been here all day. We're looking for a man with a limp, using a cane, who may have lingered here throughout the afternoon, or left and returned later."

"I didn't notice anyone like that."

Rand believed him, even if the others had doubts. Oleg Penkov hadn't gained his remarkable reputation for disguise by making foolish mistakes. He'd be seen once and only once. If it was necessary for him to return to the scene, it would be in an entirely different guise.

Suddenly Leila tugged at his sleeve. "That man over there!"

"What about him?" Rand followed her gaze to a distinguished-looking white-haired gentleman with a walking stick, starting down the path to the stream.

"Don't you see it? That's the photograph we were just looking at! That's Penkov without his makeup!"

"My God!"

Rand moved forward, stepping between the lines of pilgrims, cutting in front of a blind man and his guide dog. The man with the walking stick was moving faster now, limping only a little. He was almost to the stream before Rand intercepted him.

"Pardon me, Mr. Penkov?"

The face turned toward him, smiling uncertainly, and Rand almost missed the sudden swing of the stick. It was only Leila's shouted warning from behind that alerted him in time, and he lifted his right arm to ward off the half-seen blow, twisting away from it. Then both of them were locked together, toppling down the last few feet of the path into the healing waters of the stream.

It took Camber and Parkinson to pry them apart, restraining the

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Russian while he and Rand were hauled from the water. Hastings, whose mind had always run to management matters, quickly arranged with Fowler for the use of a small storeroom at the back of the concession stand. It was there that they tried to dry out while awaiting Sergeant Winston's reinforcements and a change of clothes.

"You English are mad!" Oleg Penkov insisted. "What are you trying to do?"

Hugh Camber glowered at him. "Your leaders talk of peace and a new beginning, yet they send you to spy on us."

"No, no—you don't understand! My mission is to dismantle a network of sleeper agents. Some have been in place for twenty years or longer. I am calling on each of them personally, telling them we no longer have a need for them."

"A likely story," Camber snapped. "Then what about the young woman? Why did you kill her?"

"I didn't."

The American picked up the walking stick and broke it over his knee in a dramatic attempt to expose the man's lie.

It was only wood. There was no thin metal blade within.

Hastings and Rand exchanged glances. Parkinson said, trying to keep his voice calm, "Give me the names of the agents you've contacted."

The Russian shivered in his wet clothes. "That would hardly be fair, would it? They have taken no action against your country, and now they will not. Most were recruited during their university days and never used. Why punish them for what might have been?"

"Who killed Karen Hayes?" Camber asked.

"I have no idea. I didn't know the woman."

"She's been on your trail since London."

The Russian's eyebrows raised slightly. "Oh?"

"What about the person you were to meet here?" Rand asked.

"There was no one I was to see here. I stopped off on my way to Edinburgh."

"To take the waters."

"My leg—"

"I know." Rand sighed and went outside, hoping the evening sun would help dry his clothes faster. They would get nowhere with Oleg Penkov.

It was, of course, just possible that he was telling the truth about the purpose of his mission. The cold war was over. Only people like

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Camber and Parkinson and whoever killed Karen Hayes hadn't heard about it yet.

Hastings followed him out. "What do you want to do?" he asked.

"It's not up to me. Parkinson and the American seem to be running things."

"They need you, Rand. They're backed into a corner. If they tell Sergeant Winston to arrest the Russian, he'll do just that, and we may have an international incident on our hands."

Rand watched the long lines of people moving toward the healing waters, looking for something to believe in. Maybe everyone was. He didn't know why it had happened, but suddenly he thought he knew who had murdered Karen Hayes.

"I'm going to my car," he told Hastings. "Stay here with Leila and back me up."

"What do you want us to do?"

"You'll know when the time comes."

He hurried across the busy parking lot, climbed into his car, backed out of the space, and edged into the exit line heading toward the highway. Camber and Parkinson had come out to watch now, too, and ahead on the highway Rand saw the flashing lights of Detective Sergeant Winston's vehicle arriving at last.

There was a pause in the line to allow the patrol car to enter and Constable Stebbins directed it with a flourish—then he turned back to the exiting line, directing Rand to follow the car ahead. Rand's small sedan almost brushed against Stebbins as it passed, and it was a simple matter for Rand to reach out the window on the driver's side and grab his baton. He saw the color drain from the constable's face, and then Stebbins turned and broke into a run through the rows of vehicles.

Hastings and Parkinson caught him just as he reached the highway.

Later, at the local police station, it was Detective Sergeant Winston who explained the charges against him. "You understand, Stebbins, that we're concerned here strictly with the murder of the American woman, Karen Hayes. Anything else is a matter for these gentlemen. I'm waiting only for the blood test on the grooves of your baton."

"I understand, sir," the constable said, staring at his hands.

Winston nodded and began filling out forms. "But I'm sure we'd

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all like to hear from Mr. Rand how he was able to deduce that the murder weapon was hidden in your baton."

"That was something of a guess," Rand admitted, "though an educated one. If we believe Penkov's story, and there was no reason to doubt it, he was in this country to contact various sleeper agents, men and women in deep cover who might have surfaced in the event of hostilities between Britain and Russia. These agents were being cut loose, freed of any commitments. Karen Hayes had followed Penkov and recorded his contacts in other cities. Who did he see? A teacher, a magistrate, and a postman—all civil servants or public employees of one sort or another. Then he journeyed to Foxhart, specifically to Joshua Fowler's healing waters, to inform the next person on his list. Was there anyone at Foxhart today who could be classed as a civil servant? Someone working at the healing waters who could be met nowhere else? Certainly not Fowler or the teenagers he employed to sell the bottled water. Only Constable Stebbins, stationed there to direct traffic, seemed to qualify."

Parkinson shook his head in disbelief. "What would the Russians have done with a local constable in a place like Foxhart if war broke out? The idea is ridiculous."

"Is it? Hastings told me earlier of a nearby RAF base in mothballs for years. In the event of war, that base could have reopened. Then would a police constable with a long and perfect record be quite so ridiculous? He might have been just the sort of agent the Russians needed up here."

"Still, you have no proof he killed the Hayes woman."

"No proof at first—only a vague memory. As we were leaving the stream after Fowler's little talk this noon, I was aware of a traffic jam in the parking lot. I thought no more about it at the time, especially after the body was discovered, but what caused that pile-up of cars? We've all seen how efficient Stebbins is at directing traffic. Could it be that he'd left his post for a few moments, to murder Karen Hayes back among those trees? I think it more than likely. The weapon didn't have to be as long as a sword cane—it penetrated only about seven inches. Constables in Britain don't carry guns, but Stebbins had his traffic baton. Suppose it unscrewed to reveal a thin-bladed dagger, like a sharpened knitting needle. He could have walked by Karen Hayes and stabbed her virtually undetected. It was the perfect weapon for a sleeper agent like Stebbins. He might never need it, but it was always with him."

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"How did he know about Karen Hayes?" Hastings asked quietly. "He was nowhere near when I spoke her name."

It was Constable Stebbins himself who answered, in a voice full of resignation. "She drove in right after Penkov and wanted to park near him. When I directed her down to the other end of the lot, she flashed a courtesy card from M.I.5 giving her permission to travel anywhere within Britain without delay. I knew she was following him then, and that she was after me, too. I had to kill her."

"What about your meeting with Penkov?"

"I'd received a message that he was coming, but I was on duty today. They assign a constable on weekends to handle all the traffic at Fowler's place. Penkov came there to speak with me when I took a break. After the killing he went away, but he came back. That was when you recognized him."

"He wore no makeup when he returned," Camber said.

"He said once that sometimes no disguise is the best disguise."

"It would have been," Rand agreed, "except that my wife never read the disguise manual. She just looked at the picture and recognized him."

DETECTIVERSE

SWEETNESS COUNTS

by ELIZABETH SHIPLEY

In a short space of time sweet Miss Keller
Took six husbands, and no one could quell her—
First she'd ardently pounce
On their fat bank accounts,
Then she'd wall them up down in the cellar.

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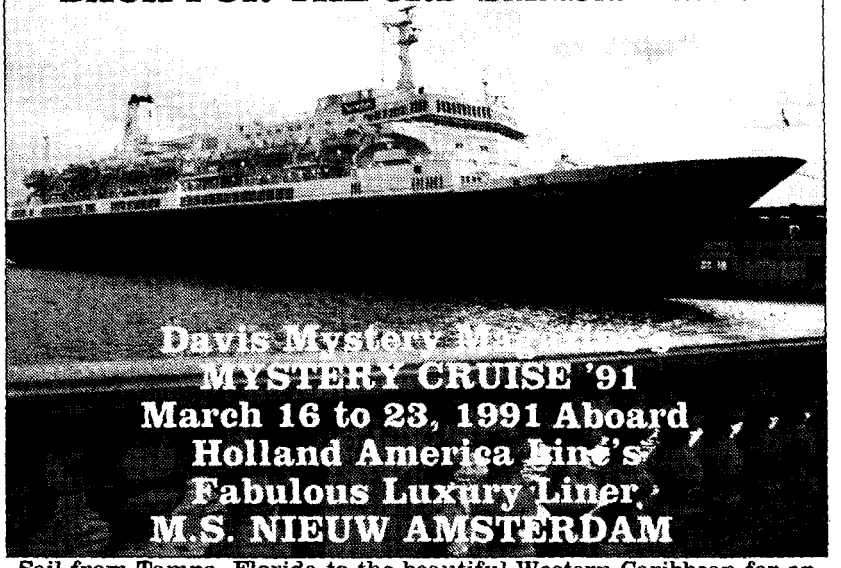

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

It was a very large house, though not large enough or handsome enough to be a stately home. Eighteen fifty-one was the year of its building. The architect, if architect there was, was one of those Victorians who debased the classical and was too cowardly for the innovations of the Gothic. White bricks were the principal building material and these were not really white but the pale, glabrous grey of cement.

In May, Crown published Gallowglass, *by Ruth Rendell writing as Barbara Vine. "Barbara Vine," P. D. James has said, "has transcended her genre by her remarkable imaginative power to explore and illumine the dark corners of the human psyche . . ."*

PAPERWORK

by RUTH RENDELL

My earliest memories are of paper. I can see my grandmother sitting at the table she used for a desk, a dining table made to seat twelve, with her scrapbook before her and the scissors in her hand. She called it her research. For years, three newspapers came into that house every day and each week half a dozen magazines and periodicals. She was a diligent correspondent. Her post was large and she wrote at least one letter each day. She was a writer without hope or desire for publication. My grandfather was a solicitor in our nearest town, four miles away, and he brought work home—paperwork. He always carried two briefcases and they bulged with documents.

Because he was a man, he had a study of his own and a proper desk. The house was quite large enough for my grandmother to have had a study, too, but she wouldn't have used that word in respect

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of herself. She had her table put into what they called the sewing room, though no sewing was ever done in it in my time. She spent most of each day in there, covering reams of paper with her small handwriting, or cutting things out of papers and pasting them into a succession of scrapbooks. Sometimes she cut things out of books, and one of the small miseries of living in that house was to open a book in the library and find part of a chapter missing or the one poem you wanted gone from an anthology.

The sewing-room door was always left open. This was so that my grandmother might hear what was going on in the rest of the house, not to indicate that visitors would be welcome. She would hear me coming up the stairs, no matter what care I took to tread silently, and call out before I reached the open door, "No children in here, please," as if it were a school or a big family of sisters and brothers living there instead of just me.

It was a very large house, though not large enough or handsome enough to be a stately home. If visitors go there now in busloads, as I have heard they do, it isn't for architecture or antiquity but for another, uglier reason. Eighteen fifty-one was the year of its building. The architect, if architect there was, was one of those Victorians who debased the classical and was too cowardly for the innovations of the Gothic. White bricks were the principal building material and these are not really white but the pale, glabrous grey of cement. The windows were just too wide for their height, the front door too low for the fat pillars which flanked it and the hemispherical portico they supported, a plaster dome shaped like the crown of my grandfather's bowler hat. It put me in mind, when I was older, of a tomb in one of London's bigger cemeteries. Or rather, when I saw such a tomb, I would be reminded of my grandparents' house.

It was a long way from the village—at least two miles. The town, as I have said, was four miles away, and anything bigger, anywhere in which life and excitement might be going on, three times that distance. There were no buses. If you wanted to go out, you went by car, and if there was no car you walked. My grandfather, wearing his bowler, drove himself and his briefcases to work in a black Daimler. Sometimes I used to wonder how my mother had gone, when I was a baby and she left me with her parents—by what means she had made her escape. It wasn't my grandmother but the daily woman, Mrs. Poulter, who told me my mother had no car of her own.

"She couldn't drive, pet. She was too young to learn, you see.

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You're too young to drive when you're sixteen but you're not too young to have a baby. Funny, isn't it?"

Perhaps someone had called for her. Anyway, two miles is not far to walk and a denizen of that house would be used to walking. Had she gone in daylight or after dark? Had she discussed her departure with her parents, asked their permission to go perhaps, or had she done what Mrs. Poulter called a moonlight flit? Sometimes I imagined her writing a note and fastening it to her pillow with the point of a knife. Notes were always being written, you see, particularly by my grandmother (to my grandfather, to Evie, to Mrs. Poulter, to the tradesmen, to me when I could read handwriting, thank-you notes, and even occasionally notes of invitation), so I had experience of them from an early age, though not of knives at that time.

I used to wonder about these things, for I had plenty of time and solitude for wondering. One day I overheard my grandmother say to an acquaintance from the village (not a friend, she had no friends):

"I have never allowed myself to get fond of the child, purely as a matter of self-preservation. Suppose its mother decides to come back for it? She is its mother. She would have a right to it. And then where should I be? If I allowed myself to get fond of it, I mean?"

That was when I was about seven. A person of seven is too old to be referred to as "it." Perhaps a person of seven months or even seven days would be too old. But overhearing this didn't upset me. It cheered me up and gave me hope. My mother would come for me. At least there was a strong possibility she would come, enough to keep my grandmother from loving me. And I understood somehow that she was tempted to love me. The temptation was there and she had to prevent herself from yielding to it, so that she was in a very different position from my grandfather, who, I am sure, had no temptation to resist.

It was at about this time that I took it into my head that the scrapbook my grandmother was currently working on was concerned with my mother. The newspaper cuttings and the magazine photographs were of her. She might be an actress or a model. Did my grandparents get letters from her? It was my job or Evie's to take up the post, and on my way to the dining room where my grandparents always had a formal breakfast together I would examine envelopes.

Most were typewritten. All the letters that came for my grandfather were typed letters in envelopes with a typed address. But

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regularly there came to my grandmother, every two or three weeks, a letter in a blue envelope with a London postmark and the address in a handwriting not much more formed than my own, the capitals disproportionately large and the g's and y's with long tails that curled round like the Basenji's. I was sure these letters were from my mother and that some of them, much cut about, found their way into the scrapbook.

If children are not loved, they say, when they are little, they never learn to love. I am grateful, therefore, that there was one person in that house to love me and a creature whom I could love. My grandparents, you understand, were not old. My mother was sixteen when I was born, so they were still in their early forties. Of course, they seemed old to me, though not old as Evie was. Even then, I could appreciate that Evie belonged in quite a different generation, the age group of my schoolfellows' grandmothers.

She was some sort of relation. She may even have been my grandmother's aunt. I believe she had lived with them since they were first married as a kind of housekeeper, running things and organizing things and doing the cooking. It was her home, but she was there on sufferance and she was frightened of my grandmother. When I wanted information, I went to Mrs. Poulter, who wasn't afraid of what she said because she didn't care if she got the sack.

"They need me more than I need them, pet. There's a dozen houses round here where they'd fall over themselves to get me."

The trouble was that she knew very little. She had come to work there after my mother left and what she knew—as, for instance, my mother's inability to drive—was from hearsay and gossip. Her name she knew, and her age, of course, and that she had not wanted to marry my father, though my grandparents had very much wanted her to marry without being particular about whom.

"They called her Sandy. I expect it was because she had ginger hair."

"Was it the same color as the Basenji?" I asked, but Mrs. Poulter couldn't tell me that. She had never seen my mother.

Evie was afraid to answer my questions. I promised faithfully I would say nothing to my grandmother of what she told me, but she wouldn't trust me and I daresay she was right. But it was very tantalizing, because what there was to know Evie knew. She knew everything—as much as my grandparents did. She even knew who the letters were from, but she could never say. My grandmother was capable of throwing her out.

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"She wanted to throw your mother out," said Mrs. Poulter. "Before you were born, I mean. I suppose I shouldn't be telling you this at your age, but you've got to know sometime. It was Evie stopped her. Well, that's what they say. Though how she did it when she never stands up for herself, I wouldn't know."

Basenjis are barkless dogs. They can learn to bark if they're kept with other sorts of dogs but left to themselves they never do, though they squeak a bit and make grunting sounds. Basenjis are clean and gentle and it is a libel to say they are bad-tempered. They are an ancient breed of hound dog native to Central Africa, where they are used to point and retrieve and drive quarry into a net. Since I left that house, I've always had a Basenji of my own and now I have two. What could be more natural than that I should love above all other objects of affection the kind I first loved?

My grandparents were not fond of animals and Evie was allowed to keep the Basenji only because he did not bark. I'm sure my grandmother must have put him through some kind of barking test before she admitted him to the house. Evie and the Basenji had a section of the house to live in by themselves. If this sounds like uncharacteristic generosity on my grandmother's part—you will not expect this from her after what I have said—in fact their rooms were two north-facing attics, the backstairs and what Mrs. Poulter called the old scullery. All the time I was not at school (taken there and fetched by Evie in the old Morris Minor Estate car) I spent with her and the Basenji in the old scullery. And in the summer, when the evenings were light, I took the Basenji for his walks.

You will have been wondering why I made no attempt to examine those scrapbooks or read those letters. Why did I never go into the sewing room in my grandmother's absence or penetrate my grandfather's study in the daytime?

I tried. Though my grandmother seldom went out, she seemed to me to have an almost supernatural ability to be in two places, or more than two places, at once. She was a very tall, thin woman with a long narrow face and dark, flat, rather oily hair which looked as if it were painted on rather than grew. I swear I have stood at the top of the first flight of stairs and seen her at the dining table which could seat twelve, the scissors in her hand, her head turned as she heard the sound of my breathing, and have run down and caught her just inside the drawing-room door, one long, dark, bony hand

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on the brass knob, twisted away swiftly, and glimpsed her in the library, taking from the shelves a book destined for mutilation.

It was all my fancy, no doubt. But she was ever alert, keeping watch. For what? To prevent my discovery of her secrets? She was a mistress of the art of secrecy. I think she loved it for its own sake. At mealtimes she locked the sewing-room door. Perhaps she hung the key around her neck. Certainly she always wore a long chain, though what was on the end of it I never saw, for it was tucked into the vee of her dark dress. The study was never locked up, but all the papers inside it were. One day, from the doorway, I saw the safe. I saw my grandfather take down the painting of an old man in a red coat and with a wig and move this way and that a dial in the wall behind it.

On Fridays Evie put all the week's newspapers out for the dustmen. She brought them out of the drawing room and brought them downstairs, a sizeable pile which I sometimes went through in the hope of finding clues. Windows had been cut out of most of them, sometimes from the sports pages, sometimes from the arts section or from the home news or the foreign news. Once, in possession of a mutilated copy of *The Times*, I managed by great guile and considerable labor to persuade Mrs. Poulter to bring me an identical undamaged copy, which she helped herself to from another house where she cleaned. But the cut-out pieces had been only a report of a tennis tournament and a photograph of a new kind of camellia exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show.

You might think my grandparents would have wanted to send me to boarding school as soon as I was old enough to go. They didn't. I would have liked to go away to school, I would have liked to go away anywhere, but Mrs. Poulter said they couldn't afford the fees. That house cost a lot to keep up. Evie went on driving me to school, four miles to the grammar school and back in the morning and four miles in and four miles back in the afternoon. She must have been in her seventies by then. She always brought the Basenji with her in the back of the car, for although she might have left him alone in that house she would never quite risk leaving him with my grandmother.

I used to badger and badger her about my mother, but she would never answer. She told me frankly that she dared not answer. But at last, driven mad by my pestering, she must have said something to my grandmother, for one morning at the breakfast table after my grandfather had left, after I had brought the post in, including one

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of the letters in the blue envelopes, my grandmother turned to face me in a slow portentous way. Her tone remote, she said,

"These letters, which you have been so curious about for years, come from a friend of mine I was at school with. Her handwriting is rather immature, don't you think?"

I think I blushed. I said quite feverishly, "Tell me about my mother."

The tone didn't change or the look. "Her name is Alexandra. I seldom hear anything of her. I believe she has married."

"Why didn't she have me adopted?" I said. "Why didn't you?"

"Naturally I can't answer for her," she said. "I doubt if she ever knew what she was doing. I would have had you adopted if it had been in my power. The mother's consent is needed in these matters."

"Why didn't she want me? Why did she go away?"

"I shan't answer any more questions," my grandmother said. "It would take too long and I should upset myself. You'll know one day. When we're dead and gone, you'll know. All about your mother and what little is known of your father, about the murder, if it was murder, and everything else. And you can tell Evie from me that if she gives you any information about what is no business whatsoever of hers, I shan't see it my duty to give her or that dog of hers houseroom any longer."

I passed this message on to Evie. What else could I do? My grandmother always meant what she said—she was a fearful woman, a cold force to be reckoned with. But the murder—what was the murder? In the ten years before I was born, there had been two in the part of the country where we lived. A woman had killed her husband and then herself. A young man, not a local, had been found dead at the wheel of his car, which was parked at the edge of a wood. He had been shot through the head. They never found who did it. I didn't have to ask Mrs. Poulter about these things, they were common knowledge, but I did ask her what they had to do with us.

"They weren't even near here, pet," she said. "The woman who killed her husband and gassed herself, she'd only been living in her house six months. And that young fellow—what was he called? Wilson? Williams?—he drove here from London, he was a stranger."

She was more easily able to explain what my grandmother meant when she said I would know everything one day, when they were dead and gone. "They're going to leave you this house and its con-

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tents. I know it for a fact. He got me in there to be a witness to their wills."

"But they don't even like me," I said.

"You're their flesh and blood. They like you as much as they like anyone, pet. Anyway, it's no big deal, is it? Who'd want it? Great white elephant, it's not worth much."

Not then, perhaps. Not then.

When I was fifteen and the Basenji was twelve and Evie getting on for eighty, my grandfather went out into the wood with his gun one morning and shot himself. They said it was an accident. After the funeral, my grandmother got a carpenter in from London and had him build her three cupboards in the sewing room. She had the kind of doors put on them which security firms recommend nowadays for the front doors of London flats, reinforced steel and with locks that when turned cause metal rods to bolt into the door frame. Into these cupboards she placed the contents of my grandfather's wall safe and all the documents from his study. She probably put her own completed scrapbooks in there, too, for I never saw her at work with scissors and paste again and there was no more mutilation of books.

There were rumors, and more than rumors, that my grandfather had been in some kind of trouble. Converting his clients' money to his own use or persuading elderly women to make wills in his favor—something of that sort. I suppose that when he went out into the wood that morning it was because he was afraid of criminal proceedings. His death must have averted that. His secrets were in the papers my grandmother hid away.

She changed after he was dead, becoming even more cold and remote, and the few acquaintances she had used to see she shunned. It was a cold house, though she had never seemed to feel it before. She did then. Evie began lighting a fire in the grate, and for some reason unknown to me it was my grandfather's cigarette lighter she used to light it—a silver object in the shape of an Aladdin lamp that stood in the center of the mantelpiece. For a while my grandmother continued to leave the sewing-room door open and when I passed and looked in the fire would be alight and she would be writing. She was always writing. Memoirs? A diary? A novel?

Records of births, marriages, and deaths were kept at Somerset House then. When I reached the age my mother was when I was born, I went by train to London and looked her up in the appropriate

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great tome. Alexandra was her name, as my grandmother had said (she never told lies), and she had married, as she also said, a man called Jeremy Harper-Green. They had two children, the Harper-Greens, a boy of six and a girl of four. I think it was when I saw this that I understood I would never meet my mother now.

The Basenji was the first to die. He was fifteen and he had had a good life. Evie and I buried him at the bottom of the garden, which was on the side of a hill from which you could look across the beautiful countryside of Derbyshire and see in the distance the landscape Capability Brown made at Chatsworth. It was winter, the woods dark and the hillsides covered with snow. I dug the grave, but Evie was there with me in the intense cold, the biting wind. She caught a cold that night which turned to pneumonia—and a week later she was dead, too.

There was nothing to keep me after that. I packed up everything I owned into two suitcases and went to the sewing room and knocked on the door. For the past year she had kept the door closed. She said, "Who is it?"—not "Come in," though it could only have been me or a ghost, for Evie was dead and she had given Mrs. Poulter the sack six months before for what she called "filling the child's head with lies and scandals."

I told her I was leaving, I was going to London. She didn't ask me if I had any money, so I was spared telling her that I had taken all the money I found hidden in Evie's rooms, in old handbags and stuffed into vases and wrapped in a scarf at the back of a drawer. Evie had told me often enough she wanted me to have what she left behind. My grandmother didn't ask me, but she did me the one good service I ever remember receiving from her hands. She gave me the name and address of that old school friend, the one who wrote the letters in the blue envelopes and who was part owner of an employment agency in the Strand.

After that, she shook hands with me as if I were a caller who had dropped in for half an hour. She didn't get out of her chair. She shook her head in a rueful way and said, not to me but as if there were someone else standing in the doorway to hear her, "Who would have thought it would have gone on for eighteen years?" Then she picked up her pen and turned back to whatever it was she was writing.

That was nearly thirty years ago. The friend with the employment

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agency got me a job. I stayed with her until I found a room of my own. I've prospered. I'm managing director of my own company now, and if I'm not rich I'm comfortably off. My marriage lasted only a short time, but there's nothing very unusual in that. Children I never wanted and I have none. Five Basenjis have been my companions through the years—one lived to be twelve, a pair who reached ten and eleven years respectively, and the five-year-olds that are with me now. They've been more to me than lovers and children.

Mrs. Poulter told me my grandmother bequeathed the house to me in her will. The chance of this inheritance I believed I lost forever on the day I left, closing the sewing-room door behind me and going down the stairs to the front door. I never heard from my grandmother again, wrote no letters, and received none. By then, for she was something over sixty when I went, I believed she was very likely dead. I seldom thought of her. I have worked hard at blocking off the misery of my early years.

The solicitor's letter coming one Monday morning four years ago told me she had died and left me the house. The funeral had taken place.

I wondered who had seen to the arrangements. The Harper-Greens? If they expected a legacy, they were disappointed, for it all came to me—the house and everything in it, the grounds from which you could see the sweeping meadows and the woods of Chatsworth.

Now I should know the answers to all those questions. I drove up there one morning in autumn, my Basenjis, who were puppies then, with me in the back of the estate car. Was the truth that she had loved me all along, valued me in her cold inexpressive way? Or had she simply not bothered to change her will because, though she cared nothing for me, there was no one else she cared more for? I inclined toward this view.

As I drove through the shires and the dukeries, the keys to the house beside me on the passenger seat, I allowed myself to speculate about those things I had long forbidden myself to think of—my grandparents' strange, loveless marriage, my mother's refusal to have me adopted, yet her willingness to abandon me to a fate she had already experienced, the identity of my father. Which of those murdered men was he? Or was he neither? What then was my family's connection with a murder? What retribution would have caught up with my grandfather if he had waited and faced it instead of going out into the woods with his gun . . . ?

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We let ourselves into the house, the dogs and I. It was dusty and the ceilings hung with cobwebs, but the smell that met me as I walked up the stairs was the smell of paper—old paper turned yellow with time and packed away in airless places. The sewing-room door was not locked.

There were ashes in the grate and the silver Aladdin's-lamp lighter still on the mantelpiece. A sheet of paper lay on the blotter on that table big enough to seat twelve. There were nine or ten lines of writing on it, the final sentence broken off in the middle, a fountain pen lying where my grandmother had dropped it and a splutter of ink trailing from the last, half completed word. It was a kind of awe I felt and a growing dismay. The miseries and those earliest memories I thought I had succeeded in forgetting began to crowd back.

With the keys from the bunch I held, I unlocked the burglarproof cupboard doors. It was all there—all the secrets, in fifty scrapbooks, in a thousand letters received and a thousand copies of letters sent, in a hundred diaries, in deeds and agreements and contracts, in unnumbered handwritten manuscripts. The smell of paper, or perhaps it was the smell of ink, was acrid and nauseating. The dogs padded about the room, sniffing in corners, sniffing along skirting boards and around chair legs, sniffing and holding up their heads as if in thought, as if considering what it was they had smelt.

I began emptying the cupboards. Everything would have to be examined, page by page, word by word, and in this house, in this room. How could I take it away except in a removal van? I imagined the misery of it, the enclosing oppression as sad and dreadful things were slowly revealed. The tears came into my eyes and I began to weep as I knelt there on the floor with the piles of paper all round me. The dogs came and licked my hands as dogs licked the sores of Lazarus.

I got up and went to the fireplace and took my grandfather's silver lighter off the mantelpiece. I struck it with my thumb and the flame flared orange and blue. The Basenjis were watching me. They watched me as I applied the lighter to the pile of paper and the flame began to lick across the first sheet—lick, die, smolder, lick, crackle, burst into bright flame.

I picked up the dogs, one under each arm, and ran down the stairs. The front door slammed behind me. What happened to the keys, I

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don't know—I think I left them inside. I didn't look back, but drove fast away and back to London.

It had been insured, but of course I didn't claim on the insurance. The land belongs to me and I could have another house built on it but I don't suppose I ever shall. Two years ago, a tour company wrote to me and asked if they might bring parties to look at the burnt-out shell as part of a scenic Derbyshire round trip. So now, I'm told, the coach that goes to Chatsworth and Haddon Hall and Bess of Hardwick's house follows the winding road up the hill to my childhood home and shows off to tourists the blackened ruin and the incomparable view.

I'll never forget the way the police told me my house had burned down. Later they hinted at arson, and this is how the guide explains the destruction to visitors. But that same evening, when I had only been back a few hours, the police came and spoke to me very gently and carefully. I must sit down, keep calm, prepare myself for something very upsetting.

They called it bad news.

"Q"

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ON OUR COVER

Robert Loggia, now playing the title role on NBC-TV's *Mancuso FBI,* first portrayed the grumpy veteran FBI agent Nick Mancuso in the mini-series *Favorite Son,* based on the novel and screenplay by Steve Sohmer. The novel has now been published in twenty countries with more than three million copies in print.

Born in New York City, Loggia attended New Dorp High School and Wagner College on Staten Island, then completed his Bachelor of Journalism degree at the University of Missouri in 1951. Having appeared in several college productions, he auditioned for the legendary Alvina Krause of Northwestern University and was offered a season of summer stock at Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania. Next he served with the U.S. Army in Panama as a news reporter for the Caribbean Forces Network.

After his discharge in 1953, he studied with Stella Adler, was accepted into the Actors Studio, and won raves in the Off Broadway production of *The Man with the Golden Arm.* He made his film debut in *Somebody Up There Likes Me.* His extensive movie, stage, and TV credits since then include directing episodes of *Magnum P.I., Quincy,* and *Hart to Hart.*

He received a 1985 Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his work in *Jagged Edge.* Other recent film credits include *Big, Prizzi's Honor, Scarface,* and *An Officer and a Gentleman.* Two upcoming movies are *Opportunity Knocks* with Dana Carvey and *Triumph of the Spirit* with Willem Dafoe and Edward James Olmos, a semifictional account of Salamo Arouch, the Greek Jewish boxing champion who was interned in a death camp near Auschwitz during World War II in which Loggia plays Poppa, Arouch's father/trainer who was also sent to the camps. Author Elie Wiesel, who saw a rough cut of *Spirit,* has reportedly given Loggia high praise for his performance. "It's because I played a father," he says. "You can't play the Holocaust. If you tried, you'd be beating your chest, tearing your hair out, screaming. I think Wiesel liked it because it's true to life."

The actor lives in Beverly Hills with his wife Audrey.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Baytown story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"Gotch hates their guts, Carpenter and the mayor. He wants to bring them down. That's why he's backing the Examiner. *That's why he's paying me an inflated salary. And that's why I'm buying you another beer. Waiter!"*

Temple watched Mason as he paid with a twenty. "You're making me nervous, Spike."

Mason laughed. "For a non-swimmer, you're a cool guy. Here's the deal. I need information. Something I can print in the paper. Scandal . . ."

ALL THE LITTLE PUSSYCATS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

A man walked in and sat down at the end of the hall while the girls were singing "Sweet and Low." It was Spike Mason. Ben Temple decided to cut the rehearsal short. Mason wouldn't come around unless there was something important going on.

When the song ended, the vocal coach said, "That was good. But if you expect to win next Saturday in Centralia, you can't take any more days off."

Nadine Carpenter said, "Yesterday was Lila's fault. She had a heavy date."

"I'll get you for that," Lila Faria said. All five girls began bickering.

Temple cut them off. "Stop telling on each other." A rhyme from childhood popped into his mind. He recited it like a teacher:

"Tattle-tale tit, your tongue shall be split,
And all the little pussycats will have a piece of it."

He got out of his chair. "Be on time tomorrow."

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The gorgeous sixteen-year-olds, "The Baytown Belles," fled the hall.

Temple ambled back to where Mason was sitting. He couldn't help remembering the near disaster at Crystal Lake thirty years ago. Mason stood up, still the powerful athlete. He lowered his eyebrows. "You don't call an old buddy when you hit town?"

It was nice to be called an old buddy, but it wasn't true. Temple and Mason had never been close friends. "I wanted to look you up, Spike," Ben said, "but the Golden Ballad Competition has me tied down. Axel Carpenter wants his daughter to be among the winners. He's not kidding."

Mason made his eyes go innocent. "Axel?" he said. "Are you sure you're not doing it for the kid's mother?"

"It was Mariette," Temple conceded, "who remembered me and asked her husband to give me the job."

"Let's just check the old dossier. You two knew each other in Montreal for years before she met and married Axel. Mariette was dancing with Les Ballets Flambeaux. You were part of a vocal group called The Temple Tones. You worked charity shows together."

"I forgot. I'm dealing with the *Baytown Banner*'s ace reporter."

"Not any more. I work for the new paper now, The *Examiner*."

"Can Baytown support another newspaper?"

"If Garrison Gotch has anything to say about it. Gotch and his money."

Temple recognized the name of an important real-estate developer. After Gotch and Axel Carpenter, there weren't a lot of major-league property deals going on in Baytown. It had been this way since before he moved to Montreal.

"Can I buy you a beer?" he said.

"What a good idea."

Mason put an arm around Ben's shoulder as they walked out of the Salvation Army Hall and onto Pinnacle Street. Late-afternoon sun lit up the granite wall of the Court House, where it sat like a castle on its terraced lawn. "And then, because I have a big favor to ask my old buddy, I'll buy you one."

They sat in the men's beverage room of the Coronet Hotel, Temple's home away from home. They caught each other up on the progress of history. Ben was married to Sarah, who was back home in Montreal West looking after seven-year-old Bobby and producing ceramic pots and planters. She was busy now filling orders for the

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Christmas trade. Mason was still playing the field. Once the big man had nearly made it to the Canadian Olympic volleyball team. His nickname derived from his career at Baytown High, when he would time his leap near the net to spike the ball with such force it was unreturnable. But a damaged knee had ended his effectiveness on the court. "Now I only play for fun," he said.

"That's too bad."

"Not really. I have more important fish to fry these days." He glanced around the room. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

"Here comes the favor."

Mason's laugh was spontaneous. "You've got it, Ben." He poured the dregs of a spent glass of beer into the new one he had begun drinking. "The powers that be in Baytown are soon to become the powers that were. This time next year, if all goes well, Mr. Axel Carpenter and his City Hall cronies will be dead in the water."

Was it intentional? The turn of phrase was in common use but, as both men raised their heads and their eyes met, Temple sensed that Mason had just put him on the spot. Mason emphasized this by denying it. "I'm sorry, Ben. I didn't mean to bring that up."

But here it was. Temple could feel the damp boards of the raft under his feet. All the others were back at the pier, heading for the cars. The distance was not great—perhaps seventy-five yards. He had made it out to the raft holding onto an inner tube, but one of the girls had taken the tube to get back to the pier.

Hell, it was all in the mind. Ben, fourteen years old, did a belly-flop off the raft. He began swimming with all the form he could muster, curving his arms to reach ahead and draw the water to him, kicking straight-legged from the hips, but he seemed not to be moving. He lost his rhythm and his legs began bending at the knees. Then he saw in his mind's eye the depth of the lake extending hundreds of feet below him. His face was in the water. He took in a mouthful, tasting of August. Shame fled, chased by fear. He managed to call, "Help!"

Now it was no kidding. He was trying to tread water, thrashing with his arms and screaming while strength ran out of him. Spike Mason had his clothes on. He kicked out of his shoes as he ran the length of the pier and launched himself in an arrow dive. He was beside the drowning boy in half a minute, turning him, ordering him to relax, crooking an arm across his chest, using a powerful sidestroke as he dragged him to the pier.

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The best part of the rescue took place on shore. With the other kids crowding around, some of them smirking, Mason ended the ridicule once and for all. "Everybody shut up," he commanded in such a tone that nobody ever referred to the event again.

So now Ben set down his glass and said, "What is it you want me to do?"

The journalist said, "My employer, the estimable Gotch, has ambitions. He wants to control this town. No. He wants Axel Carpenter not to control it. Remember the new airport Carpenter Construction built between here and Centralia? It was placed on cheap land belonging to a consortium headed secretly by the mayor and including Axel Carpenter. They both banked a nice profit."

"Nothing unusual about that."

"But at the time Mr. Gotch had speculated on another parcel of land. It was an equally good site for the airport."

"And he's cheesed off at being left high and dry."

"How mildly you put it." Suddenly Mason's beer seemed to taste sour. "Gotch hates their guts, Carpenter and the mayor. He wants to bring them down. That's why he's backing the *Examiner*. That's why he's paying me an inflated salary. And that's why I'm buying you another beer. Waiter!"

Temple watched Mason as he paid with a twenty. "You're making me nervous, Spike."

Mason laughed. "For a non-swimmer, you're a cool guy. Here's the deal. I need information. Something I can print in the paper. Scandal."

"Against the mayor?"

"And Axel Carpenter. One nasty fact is all we ask. I'll spin it into a thousand incriminating words."

When Ben was a teenager, one afternoon in March when the snow was melting and the gutters were filled with slush, he had been walking on Front Street. A car approached at speed, running a light. He could see what was going to happen, but he had no place to go except pressed back against a shop facade. It wasn't far enough. The car's wheels splashed a wave of cold black water over his shoes, into his cuffs, across the front of his overcoat. Mason's proposition was like that. He was going to get filthy, but he had no place to go.

He said, "It's because I know Mariette."

"I'm not suggesting she tell you anything. Although pillow talk can be revealing."

"We don't have that kind of relationship."

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"But you do get inside the house. And Carpenter is away a lot of the time. And he has an office there." Mason lifted his glass and held it out until Temple could only do the same. "I'm yelling for help, Ben."

The glasses touched and the men drank.

She was coming out of the laneway from the Footbridge, carrying one of the pastry shop's square white boxes. Temple lengthened his stride. He loved this about Baytown—pathways were never far apart. In Montreal it needed a telephone call and a complicated set of plans to bring them together. He called, "Mariette!"

She turned and hit him with the smile. Ebony eyes and white teeth flashed in the smooth, tanned face. "You caught me, Ben." She made a pretense of hiding the box. "A dozen butterscotch tarts. I'm so ashamed."

Her accent started the buzz in his head. Some French-Canadians add a kind of music when speaking English. Temple had told her never to lose it. "I was hoping I'd run into you," he told her.

"You've been drinking beer."

"I was with Spike Mason." She made a face. He had better shut up about Mason. "We went to school together."

"How was the rehearsal? Nadine hasn't come home."

"She can sing. They can all sing."

His admiration for Mariette was like an illuminated sign on that small-town street. She was enjoying the attention but she thought it wise to move it inside. "You need food," she said.

"Does it show?"

"Come home with me. I'll fix us something." She handed him the box of tarts and found her keys as they approached her car. "Axel is out of town."

It was like old times, with Temple opening the wine. "Remember the parties after the Red Feather Shows?" These were Montreal charity events. Les Ballets Flambeaux would appear and so would Ben's vocal group. They were both single in those days. The standard mood, as he recalled, was euphoria. Earlier, on stage, Mariette would have been devastating under pink light in a torrid "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." Ben's quartet would have nailed them to the wall with his arrangement of "Early Autumn."

"We were sensational," Mariette remembered.

"Big-time shows," he agreed.

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"I meant you and me, Ben." She was making nice moves in the kitchen. "Relax. You can be as married as you like."

"Sarah's coffee mugs are in Ogilvy's now. Did I tell you?"

"She has everything, that woman. Contracts with the best stores. And she has you."

"How long have you and Axel been married?"

"What time is it now?"

"Cut it out. Nadine is sixteen."

"Nineteen years," Mariette said. The telephone rang. "Speak of the devil." It was Nadine saying she would be eating at Lila Faria's house and might sleep over. Mariette put down the phone. "It's you and me, kiddo."

Ben thought of Mason's assignment as he poured her glass brimful of wine.

He wouldn't dance with her, didn't want to feel her in his arms. Twenty years ago she had stood on his shoes while they swayed in place to the faint lyric from a radio buried under a sofa cushion:

"Too late now to forget your smile—"

Turning from his refusal, she moved sensuously by herself, bending her knees, spiraling slowly down, wrists in a Balinese curve. It hurt Ben to watch how good she could have been. And no use telling her that.

Later, pretending to be as drunk as she was, he put her to bed. "You can stay, Ben. Really. Axel wouldn't give a damn. All he and I do is argue. We're probably splitting up, anyway, as soon as Nadine finishes high school."

Ben kissed her goodnight and left the bedroom. But he didn't leave the house. He went downstairs and put on a light in the library that served as Carpenter's office. In addition to a wall of books, there was a desk, a computer terminal, a couple of filing cabinets. Working slowly, he began sliding a drawer open, shifting a few things inside, closing it. He didn't know what he was looking for. Mason had said it wouldn't have to be much. A puff of smoke would suffice. The journalist would use inneundo to create the impression of a large, hidden fire.

One file cabinet was empty. The top drawer of the other was jammed with files. There was correspondence, photocopies of mechanical drawings, building codes—it would take forever to go through the stuff. Then Ben saw the ledger. Bound in green simulated-leather and half an inch thick, it was stuffed between files at

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the back of the drawer. Lifting the adjoining file to mark the place, he drew the book out and opened the cover. And there it was.

Down the left side of the page was a list of dates, going back three years. Matching the dates were sums of money—fifteen hundred, seventeen hundred. Temple did a quick total. The amounts added up to $120,000. But it was the name at the top of the page that suggested here was Spike Mason's scandal: Jamie Haver. Any Baytowner would know who Jamie Haver was. He was not himself an elected official, but he was an old-time party worker, friend and associate of Baytown's mayor. It looked as if Axel Carpenter had been paying off Haver for years. Was the mayor getting his share? Mason and Gotch could certainly make it seem so.

The pages in the ledger were perforated near the binding. Temple tore out the list carefully and put it in his pocket. Then he replaced the ledger between files and slid the door shut. When he turned from the cabinet, Nadine Carpenter was standing in the doorway.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him.

With his heart pounding, Ben said, "Admiring the layout."

"Where's Mother?"

"In bed. You were supposed to be sleeping over at Lila's."

"I changed my mind." She went to the cabinet, opened the drawer, and closed it again. "Were you looking for something?"

"Not really."

"I don't like this. I'm going to tell Father."

"Please don't."

"Why not? What's going on?"

"I told you—nothing." Temple walked out of the office with the girl following him. He went to the front door. "Practice is at two o'clock."

"It feels weird, Ben. Finding you in there. I'm going to tell Daddy."

"You'll only cause trouble."

"I don't care, I'm telling him."

There was a lot at stake. The vocal competition next weekend could fall apart. Temple's reputation in Baytown would be damaged. Spike Mason might also end up in trouble. "Let's make a deal," Ben told the girl. "You keep quiet about this and I'll assign you the solo spot at the Golden Ballad."

Nadine was interested. The Baytown Belles were set to do three numbers. "Sweet and Low" and "Where E'er You Walk" were both done in full harmony. But then there was the solo, assigned now to Lila Faria. It was Ben's own arrangement of "You'll Never Walk

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Alone" for solo voice, with the other four humming chords and slotting in vocal punctuations.

"What'll Lila say about that?"

"She won't like it. But I'm in charge. If I say you do the solo, you do it." Messy as it would be, Ben would rather deal with the Faria family than explain his clandestine actions to Axel Carpenter. "But don't say anything about it yet," he concluded. "Let me tell Lila tomorrow."

Lila was stunned. The liquid brown eyes would haunt Temple forever. She tried to comprehend while he spoke to the group—with Nadine Carpenter keeping her face locked up tight. "See, I wrote the arrangement with a contralto in mind. You're a dynamite singer, Lila. But you're a soprano. It just isn't swinging for me without the deeper voice. The tonality is all wrong." He was pleading. "I expect you to hate me for a long time. But can you work at trying to understand?"

"It's all right," Lila said. She was a trouper. "Like you say, it'll sound better this way."

There was a telephone message in his box when Temple went to the Coronet Hotel desk that evening to pick up his room key. It was from Mariette. He called her back.

"What are you up to?" she said. "What's going on?"

"Give me a minute to think of a lie."

"Axel and I just had a hell of a fight. Over Nadine. She's puffed up about her promotion and he thinks it's great. But the fact is, Lila Faria is a better soloist."

"We have to talk, Mariette."

She picked him up at the hotel entrance. They drove along old roads with the sun going down. The sky was red behind black farm buildings and filigree trees.

He said, "What if I told you I wrote the arrangement for contralto voice?"

"Nadine explained it that way. You and I both know there's more to it."

The car swung east. The road was dark and she switched the headlights on. "It isn't the kids and their singing, Ben. It has to be something else. What else can it be but us?"

"What are you saying?"

"It's as if you deliberately tried to drive a wedge between me and Axel. But that doesn't make sense. You don't want me."

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"The fight was bad?"

"Terminal. We started over Nadine but then a lot of other things were said." She slowed the car to take a dangerous curve. "I have to get serious about the rest of my life."

Ben felt he owed her an honest explanation, for old times' sake if nothing else. "If you two are really finished," he said, "maybe I can tell you what's going on." He described the encounter with Spike Mason, including the debt he owed the journalist for the Crystal Lake rescue. He referred to the competition between Garrison Gotch and her husband, which was an old story to Mariette. He went on to Mason's assignment—that Ben balance the scales by discovering something incriminating about Axel.

"Nadine came into Axel's office the other night," he concluded, "and found me at the filing cabinets."

"Did you come up with something?"

"A lot of cash payments to Jamie Haver—they can't put the mayor in jail, but they can probably get him out of office."

The old road fed into the new highway. Mariette headed back to Baytown, traveling straight and fast. "What happens now?"

"Nothing, if you say not. I haven't given Mason the list yet. I can tell him I didn't find anything."

"No. Go ahead." Her voice was thoughtful. "It's the right thing to do. And so is giving Lila back her solo."

"Apart from appearing like a lunatic, I'd probably get killed. Nadine would tell Axel I was going through his desk."

"So?"

"You're his wife—you can fight the man and survive." Ben cranked the window closed because the rushing air felt cold. "I could end up dead."

Ben ordered an egg-and-olive sandwich and a Lime Freeze. Mason grinned. When they were in high school, the crowd used to straggle down the hill to Lattimer's, filling the back tables, making dates and telling jokes. And Ben would always have the same drink and sandwich.

"What's the verdict?" he asked Spike.

"The list is exactly what I need—dates, amounts, Haver's name. I haven't shown it to anybody yet, it's too hot. But I'm writing the story and we'll run it the beginning of next week. It can't be this weekend because everybody's thinking about the Golden Ballad."

"My girls stand a chance." But Ben wasn't thinking about the

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competition in Centralia on Saturday night. "Carpenter is going to come after you. He'll demand to know where you got the information."

"Relax," Mason said. "I protect my sources."

Centralia Hall was like a sauna. The windows were open, but the night air was a humid seventy-five degrees. Every man in the capacity crowd had his jacket off and most of the women were fanning themselves with programs.

In this, the third year of competition, standards had reached a high level. Ben recalled a fiasco from his youth. As a member of a male quartet, he had appeared at Massey Hall in Toronto for a schools recital. They were spectacularly unprepared. He thought of the group as Spitfire pilots—young, frightened, bravely advancing toward a dismal end. One by one, he watched groups from other schools with their impeccable stage presence. Then the Baytown boys filed out carrying sheet music several of them dropped on the stage at their feet. He squirmed as he remembered bending to sort through it during the applause after the first number.

The Baytown Belles wouldn't make that mistake. Here they came, sweetly dressed in pale-blue suits with flat-heeled patent-leather shoes. The silver buckle on the shoes matched the buckle on the shiny black belts. There was no instrumental accompaniment. Lila Faria sounded a single note on a pitchpipe and the girls hummed their opening chord softly. Then they began to sing and it was as if five angels had come down into that steamy hall.

"Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea—"

Temple's eyes filled with tears. His little pussycats were doing him and themselves proud. The final note of the song was held, diminuendo, until the crowd was left holding its breath in shimmering silence. Then there was applause and cheering, and not only from the Baytown contingent. Ben turned to look back across the rows and saw the Carpenters. Axel might have been attending his own coronation. Mariette gave Ben a look of some complexity. She, too, was proud—but events were unfolding rapidly and not everything was predictable.

"Where E'er You Walk" was performed equally well, but it lacked the simplicity of the opening number. Still, it was received with enthusiasm. And now it was time for the solo. The girls shifted position on the stage, Nadine moving half a step forward and the

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others forming up close behind her. Again, Lila sounded the key on her pitchpipe and the girls hummed the chord.

No sooner had Nadine begun to sing than Temple knew it was a disaster. She was nervous and it showed. Her breathing was inept. She herself heard the tremulous voice and this increased her panic. Temple knew the feeling from early experience of his own. You wanted to flee, you wanted to die. You were trapped. It was why singers spend hours daily on breathing exercises and voice production until it becomes automatic. But Nadine was too young and tonight she was getting burned.

The girls behind her increased the volume of their humming. Regardless, Nadine was lost. Her face was flushed, her eyes reflected her agony. Ben's heart pounded as he heard the climax of the song approaching. It needed power and assurance as the music advanced up the scale like a heroine climbing a mountain.

"Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone—"

The applause was generous at the end, but performers and audience alike craved relief. The Baytown Belles hurried from the stage.

Despite the solo debacle, the girls were awarded a bronze medal in their age category for group singing. In the parking lot after the show, attention was focused on this achievement, but Nadine was still mildly in shock.

Her father drew Temple to one side. "How could you let this happen, Ben?" The construction boss had come up the hard way. He loomed over Temple, massive in his expensive suit. Moonlight etched the outline of his close-cropped silver hair.

"I had no idea she'd come apart, Axel. She handled it at rehearsals."

"This isn't the time to talk about it. Come and see me tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock."

"I feel as bad as you do," Temple said.

"Nowhere near as bad. Not even in the ballpark."

Ben telephoned his wife from the hotel room. "Were you asleep?"

"In a manner of speaking," Sarah said. "I was watching Olivia Newton John."

"Remember the time I nearly drowned? I've just been through worse." He described the public humiliation of Nadine Carpenter and his part in it.

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"Did you have to go along with Spike Mason?"

"Yes. I never expected this to happen." Temple drew strength from the calming effect his wife was transmitting from two hundred miles away. "Her father wants to see me tomorrow morning."

"Attila the Builder?"

"That's daddy's little girl I set fire to onstage."

"What can he do to you? Hey, speaking of daddy, I let your son get into the clay this morning and he made you a coffee mug. It'll go in the kiln with what I fire tomorrow."

"Is it good?"

"Priceless. Who ever said mugs have to be round? Or flat on the bottom?"

At exactly ten in the morning, Mariette Carpenter opened the front door and let Ben in. She was wearing a suit of a heavy material and it did not look like Baytown. It was designed to go with luggage and first-class reservations.

"We've been talking most of the night," she said, "me and Axel. I'll be in Spain tomorrow. When school breaks for the summer, Nadine will join me. Come autumn, we're not sure."

"I wish everybody luck."

"Have you been to Spain?"

"Not yet."

"You're welcome to come."

"I can't," Temple said. "Anyway, I hate sangria."

Axel was behind his desk. He had on a red-and-white football jersey emblazoned with the biggest 97 Ben had ever seen. Nadine was sitting in an upholstered chair, her legs draped over the arm, languidly turning the coated pages of an expensive magazine without taking the time between turns to see more than the numbers.

"You're on time," Axel said. "Good. We don't have to drag this out."

"Will they have to drag me out?"

Temple's grin died.

"Originally, I was just going to have a go at you for putting my daughter in a position to embarrass herself like that."

"I told you, Axel—she was good at rehearsals."

"Just shut up, Ben. You'll have your chance. I've straightened Nadine out. Not everybody is a soloist. It's no disgrace. For every fiddle player out front, there are twenty in the section. And they're

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all good musicians. You can't perform *The Messiah* without a hundred choristers. Right, Nadine?"

"Right." Slick, clack, another page went over.

"You're a professional—you should have noticed the difference. And you did, as we now know. Nadine came clean about your little agreement. You'd give her the chance for glory and she'd keep quiet about what you were doing in my office."

"It wasn't what it looked like," Ben began.

Carpenter spoke his daughter's name. She got up on cue. She went to stand beside the filing cabinets. "You were here," she said. "You were closing the drawer. You looked guilty as hell."

"That's fine, sweetheart. You can go now." When they were alone, Carpenter stood up and went to the cabinet. "You were careful, Ben. If I hadn't been alerted, I might not have noticed." He opened the drawer and lifted out the ledger. "But since I knew you were browsing, I saw this had been taken out and put back with one page missing. Now you can protest all you like—or you can save us both a lot of time by leveling with me."

"Axel, I'm sorry. It's too late."

"What is?"

"I gave the list to Spike Mason. The dates and the amounts paid to Jamie Haver. It'll be in the *Examiner* next week."

Carpenter grinned. "Life is so dull. You keep trying to make bigger deals to turn on the juices. But it's all work and it's all the same. Then something like this comes along. I love it! Spy stuff in Baytown!"

"You're taking it well, Axel."

"You aren't reading me. I'm taking it very badly." He slammed the metal drawer. The shot reverberated in the closed room. "I don't like being robbed."

"I'm sorry," Ben said for the second time. "It's too late."

"It's never too late," Carpenter told him. "Except for you."

Mariette wasn't around to see him out. Ben carried fear with him from the Carpenter home. There had been no mistaking Axel's implication. If it came to an investigation, who could say what whitewash might be employed by Jamie Haver and the mayor and Carpenter himself to cover up their illicit actions? But one thing seemed likely—the man who uncovered the incriminating list would not be around to testify.

From his hotel room, Ben telephoned Mason and reached his an-

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swering machine. He was about to leave a message when it occurred to him that his voice and name on Mason's tape might not be a good thing. He put down the telephone.

He didn't want to ring Sarah and tell her the disturbing news. He was due back in Montreal now the competition was ended, but spending an extra day or two in his home town wouldn't seem unusual. And he had to speak to Mason.

The telephone rang. A girl's voice. "Ben?"

"Yes."

"It's Nadine." She went on in a sarcastic singsong that made the hair rise on the back of Temple's neck.

"Tattle-tale tit, your tongue shall be split,
And all the little pussycats will have a piece of it."

He listened to quite a lot of dial tone before he put down the receiver.

It was Monday afternoon and still no reply on Mason's telephone. Ben bought a copy of the *Examiner*. The article was not there. Well, the beginning of the week might mean Tuesday. He turned the pages and found, under the names of staff members, the address of the editorial offices. The struggling publication was in an old building on Front Street where it turned into Station Street, in the low-rent district.

Temple walked there in fifteen minutes. He went inside and managed to get the attention of a man who was typing with his back to the door.

"Is Spike Mason here?"

The young journalist opened a desk drawer and peered inside. "I don't see him."

"I have to talk to him."

"Mason doesn't work here any more. Try the *Banner*."

Temple went outside. The established paper was located in its own building beside the Coronet Hotel. On the way there, he tried not to think about the implications of Mason's change of employer.

He didn't have to wait long to find out. A block from Station Street, he passed the showroom of Baytown Motors. The dealership specialized in foreign imports. And here, kicking the tires of a fire-engine-red MG, was the best volleyball player the town had ever produced.

Ben went inside and stood beside the car. Mason looked at his face, then raised his arms helplessly. "What can I tell you?" The

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salesman knew enough to walk away. "They made me an offer I could have refused, Ben—but I decided what the hell, and I accepted it. Hey, I'm assistant editor at the *Banner*."

"This was Axel Carpenter?"

"It wasn't Rupert Murdoch."

Mason's implacable manner was frightening. "What about me, Spike? Carpenter's going to have me taken care of."

"Come on."

"I mean it. He let me know it. His *daughter* telephoned and let me know it. His wife is leaving him and he never liked the thing between her and me. He may think I'm going to meet her in Spain."

"Maybe you should," Mason said. He was admiring the trim little convertible. "You only live once."

"He bought you but he has no use for me. The bastard is vindictive. I'm a dead man, Spike. Unless you help me."

"How?"

"Talk to him. Call him off. Tell him you made me do it."

Mason sighed. He jingled the coins in the pocket of his cashmere slacks. "I'm sorry, Ben. I saved your life once. I can't do it for you every time."

Temple tried to sleep during the train ride back to Montreal, but his mind was working feverishly. He rode a taxi to the cottage in Montreal West.

Sarah kissed him and took the bag out of his hand. He lay on the sofa and she brought him a drink. Bobby approached, carrying the misshapen mug. Ben accepted it, praised it, poured his drink into it, and sipped with pleasure. The little boy tried to contain his pride.

"I'm shattered," Temple told his wife.

"I could see that when you came in the door."

"Carpenter's threatened me. He means it. Not just the secrecy thing. Mariette's left him and I think he blames me."

"Has he reason?"

"No."

"Go to the police."

"Carpenter is the power in Baytown. They'd never touch him. Besides, he hasn't done anything yet."

Sarah gave him one of her hands. There were stains of blue lacquer on it from her latest project. His assignment was to crack knuckles. He pulled the fingers in order and snapped three of them. "I don't know what to tell you," she said.

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"I have to get away."

"We can go to the cabin."

"Farther than that." It was a disturbing feeling, but he decided to express it anyway. "I could go to Spain."

Their years together made for efficient communication. "She's in Spain?"

"Yes."

Sarah took Bobby into the kitchen. Ben finished his drink and followed them in there. She was placing a bowl of spaghetti in front of the boy. She said, "When will you go?"

"I may not."

Sarah went to look out the screened back door at the setting sun. "The danger to us isn't from Carpenter. It's from you being of two minds about Mariette."

After supper, she took Bobby to a neighbor's house to see his friend's new computer game. Ben had been alone for half an hour when he picked up the telephone, dialed Baytown Information, obtained a number, then dialed again. A man answered.

"May I speak to Garrison Gotch, please."

"This is Gotch speaking." The voice was resonant, confident.

"You don't know me. My name is Ben Temple."

"I've heard about you. You gave Spike Mason some information I wanted. Then he decided not to share it with me."

"That's why I'm calling. I'll tell you what I found out. I'll testify in court if you want me to."

"Keep talking. I'm interested."

"Axel Carpenter threatened me. I took a list of payments from a file in his office."

"Don't say any more on the telephone. Come and see me." There was admiration in the rumbling voice. "You've got guts. When Carpenter threatens, he means it."

"I was getting ready to leave the country," Temple told him. "Then I thought of what a cat does when it's in danger. It turns and faces the enemy. Makes itself big." Sarah and Bobby were coming back through the front door, laughing. He felt eager to tell his wife what he had decided to do. "Cats live a long time," he told Gotch.

"Q"

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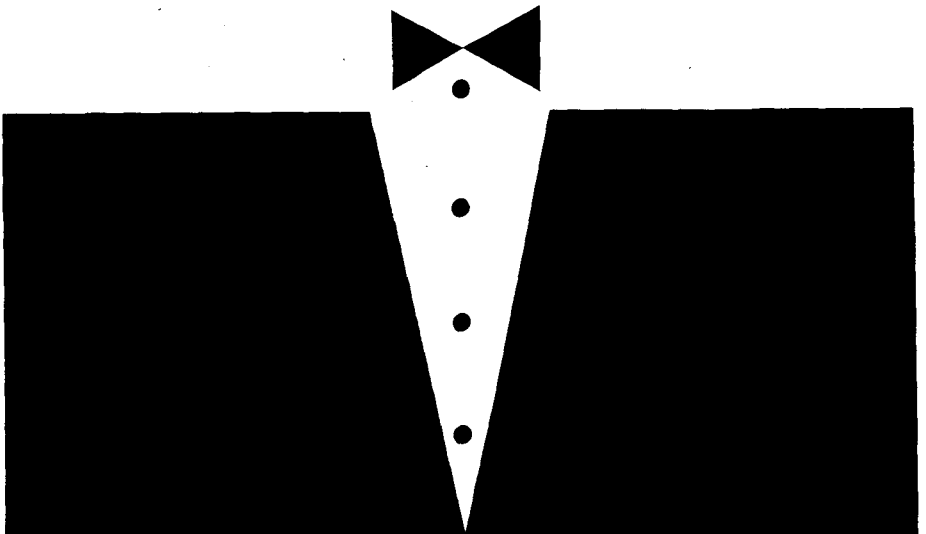

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a distinguished reprint by

KAREL CAPEK

Notes about Karel Capek (pronounced Chop-ek) from Kunitz and Haycraft's Twentieth Century Authors: *He was born in Bohemia in 1890, the son of a physician, and educated at the University of Prague, with courses later in Berlin and Paris. Although his first published work was a translation of French poetry, he was attracted primarily to American and English ways of thought. He was a passionate gardener. On his celebrated Friday evenings "at home," he held open house for the liberal, intellectual world of Prague. At the same time, he was the actuating spirit of modern theater in Czechoslovakia. His first plays and stories were written in collaboration with his brother Josef, also well known as a primitivist painter. Karel Capek almost literally died of the death of his country—after the Munich Conference he seemed to lose the will to live, and succumbed quickly to pneumonia on Christmas Eve 1938. Josef died in a concentration camp in 1945.*

"The Crime at the Post Office" is the third story by Karel Capek in EQMM ("The Coupon" appeared in the August 1948 issue and "The Fortune Teller" in the June 1954 issue). It is reprinted from the collection published this spring by Catbird Press to celebrate the centennial of the author's birth, Toward the Radical Center: A Karel Capek Reader, *edited by Peter Kussi and including the first complete English translation of the author's famous* R.U.R. . . .

"Q"

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THE CRIME AT THE POST OFFICE

by KAREL CAPEK

"Talk about Justice," Police Sergeant Brejcha said. "I'd like to know why the pictures always show some female with a bandage on her eyes and grocery-store scales. What I mean is, Justice seems more like a policeman to me. You wouldn't believe the things us policemen pass judgment on—without any judge, without any scales, and without all the fuss and feathers. In a few cases we tap a few jaws and in most cases we take off our belts, but that's all justice is in ninety cases out of a hundred. But I'll tell you right now, Mister, I proved two people guilty of murder myself, and I was the one what sentenced them to just punishment—and even decided what that punishment was to be—and I've never said a word about it to nobody. But I'm going to tell it to you right now."

You'll recall, Mister, that little Miss what worked here two years ago in our village postoffice? Sure, Helenka, that was her name. She was such a good, kind girl, pretty as a picture. Not likely you'd forget her. Well, this Helenka, last summer she drowned herself—she jumped in that big pond near here and went out maybe fifty meters until she got to the deep part, and she didn't wash up for two days. And you know why she did it? On that same day when she drowned herself, there was this auditor from Prague who suddenly turned up at our post office and found out Helenka was short a couple of hundred crowns from the cash drawer. A miserable couple of hundred! That bonehead of an auditor said he was going to report it and there'd be an investigation, like for embezzlement. But that evening, Helenka drowned herself from shame.

When they pulled her out, over the dike, I had to stay with her until the coroner came. There wasn't anything pretty about her then, poor little girl, but I kept seeing her the whole time the way she used to be, smiling behind the window at the post office. We all hung

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around there because of her, you know. Everybody liked that girl. Damn it, I said to myself, that girl never stole no two hundred crowns. In the first place, I just didn't believe it—and in the second place, she sure didn't need to steal: her daddy was the miller here on the other side of town, and she was only there at the post office because of some female urge to make her own living for herself. I knew her daddy well. He was a sort of writer and a Protestant, too—and let me tell you, these writers and Protestants around here, they never steal nothing. Mister, I promised that dead girl right there on the dike that I wasn't going to let this business drop.

All right, then, the next thing that happens is they send some smart young fellow from Prague up here to the post office named Filipek—a very pleasant, toothy sort of guy. Well, I went over to the post office to see this Filipek, because I wanted to check something out. It's just like all these other little small-town post offices, you know: a counter with a little window, and on the clerk's side a little cash drawer for stamps and money, and right in back of the clerk is this sort of shelf, with a bunch of ratebooks and notices and papers and a scale for weighing packages and things like that. "Mr. Filipek," I says to him, "please take a look in those ratebooks and tell me how much it costs to send a cable to Buenos Aires, say."

"Three crowns per word," says Filipek, without batting an eyelash.

"Then how much for a telegram to Hong Kong?" I ask him again.

"I'd have to look it up," says Filipek, and he gets up and turns around to the ratebook. And while he's going through the books with his back to the counter, I squeeze my shoulders through the little window and reach my hand in the cash drawer and pull it out. And it opens very nice and quiet.

"Thanks, I've got it," says I, "and here's how it could have happened. Suppose Helenka was looking something up in the ratebook. Right then, somebody could have swiped the two hundred from the cash drawer. Take a look, Mr. Filipek, and see if you can tell me who sent a telegram or a package from here in the last few days."

Mr. Filipek scratches his head, and he says: "Sergeant, it can't be done. You see, that amounts to something like confidentiality of the mail—unless you do your looking in the name of the law. But I'd have to notify the head office that a search had taken place."

"Hold on," I says to him, "I don't care to do that for the present. But, look, if you was to more or less—just for lack of something better to do—sort of poke through those papers and see if maybe

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somebody did send something from here, so that maybe Helenka had to turn her back away from the counter—"

"Sergeant," says Mr. Filipek, "what if she did? Any telegram forms will be here, but for registered letters and packages we only have a record of who something was sent to—not who sent it. I'll make a list for you of all the names I find here. Actually, I'm not even supposed to do that, but for you I will. But I don't think you'll learn beans from it."

Filipek was right about that. He handed me maybe thirty names—you know, not much goes on in a village post office, only a parcel now and then for some lad in the service—and there wasn't a pin in the pickings. Mister, I went out and walked and talked that case to myself from seven sides, but to no use. And it plagued me that I wasn't keeping my promise to poor Helenka.

Then one day, it must have been about a week later, I went back to the post office again. This Filipek looks me over and he says, "Say goodbye to your bowling partner, Sergeant, I'm moving out. A new girl's coming tomorrow, from the post office in Pardubice."

"Aha," I says to that. "Some kind of demotion, no doubt, transferring this girl from the big city to a one-horse town."

"Not at all," Filipek says, and he gives me a kind of peculiar look. "Sergeant, this girl's being transferred here at her own request."

"That's odd," says I, "but then you know how women are."

"Odd it is," Filipek says, but he goes on looking at me. "And odder still is that the anonymous letter which brought about that flash-flood postal audit also came from Pardubice."

I whistled, and then I realized that Filipek and I were staring at each other in the very same way. And then suddenly old Uher, the postman, who was sorting the mail for delivery, he speaks up and says: "Yeah, sure, Pardubice. That's where the supervisor over at the big estate writes to almost every day—some young lady there at the postoffice. She's his sweetie."

"Listen, grandpa," says Filipek, "do you know what her name is?"

"Something like Julie Touf—Toufar—"

"Tauferova," Filipek says. "That's her. That's the one who's coming here."

"That there Mr. Houdek," says old Uher, "that Houdek what's the supervisor there, he gets a little letter back from Pardubice, too, almost every day. 'Mr. Supervisor,' I tell him, 'here's a letter from your sweetie again.' He always walks down the road to meet me. I've got this here little parcel for him today—it got sent back to him

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from Prague. See how it's stamped? 'Recipient unknown.' He got the address wrong, Mr. Supervisor did. So I'm taking it back to him."

"Show it to me," says Filipek, and he looks it over. "It's addressed to somebody named Novak, Spalena Street, Prague. Contents: two kilos of butter. Postmark: July fourteenth."

"That's when Miss Helenka was still here," says old Uher.

"Show it to me," I says to Filipek, and I take a sniff at it. "Mr. Filipek," I says, "that's odd, but this here butter was ten days on the road and it don't even stink. Grandpa, you just leave this package here and go off on your round."

Old Uher was hardly gone when Filipek says to me: "Sergeant, this is against all the rules, but here's a penknife." And then he left so's he wouldn't have to watch.

Mister, I tore open that package, and inside there wasn't nothing but two kilos of dirt. So I go find Filipek right away and I tell him. "Man, don't say anything about this to anyone, understand? I'm going to take care of this business myself."

You can bet I pulled myself together and set right out after this Houdek over at the estate. He was sitting there on a pile of planks, just staring at the ground. "Mr. Supervisor," says I, "there's some kind of mixup over there at our post office. You recall what address it was on that little package you sent to Prague ten or twelve days ago?"

Houdek looks a little funny and he says: "It doesn't matter—and anyway, I don't remember now what it was."

"Mr. Supervisor," says I, "what kind of butter was it?"

Houdek turns white as a wall. "What's that supposed to mean?" he cries out. "Why are you bothering me with all this?"

"Mr. Supervisor," I says to him, "it's this way. You killed our Helenka from the post office. You sent a package from there with a fake address so she'd have to weigh it on the scales. And while she was doing that, you snuck into the cash drawer and stole two hundred crowns. Because of those two hundred crowns, Mr. Supervisor, Helenka drowned herself. That's how it is."

Mister, I tell you, Houdek was shaking like a leaf. "That's a lie," he cries. "Why would I steal two hundred crowns?"

"Because you wanted to have your sweetheart, Julie Tauferova, here at our post office. That girl friend of yours sent an anonymous letter saying Helenka was missing money from the cash drawer. It's just like the two of you pushed Helenka in the pond. It's just like

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the two of you killed her. You have murder on your conscience, Mr. Houdek."

That Houdek, he tumbled down on the planks and he covered up his face, and never, never did I ever see a man cry like that. "Jesus Christ," he was wailing, "Jesus Christ, I couldn't know she'd drown herself! I only thought she'd be let go—that she'd just go back home! Officer, all I wanted to do was marry Julie! But one of us would have had to give up our jobs if we were going to be together—and we can't live on one salary. That's why I wanted so much for Julie to get the job here at the post office! We've already been waiting for five years. Sergeant, we love each other so much—so much!"

It was almost nighttime, and here was this fellow Houdek down on his knees in front of me, and me blubbering over the whole business like a ninety-year-old bride—over Helenka and over everybody else, too.

"That's enough," I finally says to him, "that's enough. I've had it up to here. Now hand over those two hundred crowns. Right. And now listen: if it occurs to you to marry Miss Tauferova before I set this whole business straight, then I'll charge you with theft—understand? But if you shoot yourself or do anything else like that, I'll go ahead and tell why you did it. And that's that."

That night, Mister, I sat in judgment on those two, there under the stars. I asked God how I should punish them, and I truly saw why justice is such a bitter, painful joy. If I did bring charges against them, this Houdek would get a couple of weeks in jail and then go on probation. But it would be very hard to prove. Houdek killed that girl—but he wasn't a common thief. To me, every punishment was either too big or too small. That's why I was judging and punishing them myself.

The next morning, I went back to the post office. Sitting there behind the window was this tall, pale girl with fierce, burning eyes. "Miss Tauferova," says I, "I have a registered letter here," and I gave her a letter addressed "Director of Postal Communications, Prague." She looked at me and stuck the label on.

"Just a minute, Miss," I said. "Inside this letter is a charge against the person who stole two hundred crowns from your predecessor. What's the postage?"

Mister, there was a terrible strength in that woman. All the same, she turned ashy pale and she was stiff as a stone. "Three crowns fifty," she said, hardly breathing.

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I counted out the money and I said, "Here you are, Miss. But if those two hundred crowns should happen to turn up," I said while I put the stolen banknotes on the counter in front of her, "if those two hundred crowns should happen to turn up here—fallen down or misplaced somewhere, you understand?—so that everyone will know that poor Helenka didn't steal it, well then, Miss, I could take back my letter. Now what about it?"

She didn't say a word—she just sat there, fierce and burning and stiff like I've never seen anybody before anywhere.

"The postman will be here in five minutes, Miss," I said. "What about it, then? Shall I mail the letter?"

She shook her head quickly. So I picked up the letter and walked out in front of the post office. Mister, I've never marked time with so much strain and suspense. And then, twenty minutes later, old Uher ran out, crying: "Officer, it's been found! The two hundred crowns Miss Helenka was missing! It was all a mistake!"

"Grandpa," I told him, "go run and tell everybody that the two hundred crowns have been found. You know, so that everybody will know Helenka didn't steal them, thank God!"

So then, that was the first thing. The second thing was that I went to see the owner of the big estate. You probably don't know him. He's a count—a little crazy, but a very nice man. "Sir," I tell him, "don't ask me any questions, but there's a little police matter going on here that has to be taken care of. Call your supervisor, Houdek, and tell him he has to leave today for your place in Moravia. If he doesn't want to go, tell him you're giving him an hour's notice."

The old count raised his eyebrows and stared at me for a while. Mister, there's no way I could have forced myself to look more serious than I did, more so than anybody can imagine. "Very well," says the count, "I won't ask you any questions. I'll summon Houdek now."

Houdek came—and when he saw me with the count, he flinched. But he stood straight as a stick. "Houdek," says the count, "harness the horses and get down to the train station. You begin service this evening at my estate in Hulin. I'll send a telegram so they'll be expecting you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Houdek said quietly, and he fixed his eyes on me—like the eyes of the damned in hell.

"Have you any objections?" the count asked.

"No," said Houdek hoarsely, and he never let his eyes drop from me. Mister, those eyes were agony to me.

"Then you must go," says the count, and that was that. After a

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minute or so, I saw them taking Houdek away in the coach. He sat there like a wooden puppet.

"And that's the whole story, Mister. But if you go to the post office, you'll see this pale, pale woman there. She's mean and angry at everyone, and she's getting old and mean lines in her face. I don't know if she ever sees her supervisor. Maybe she does go visit him sometimes, but whenever she goes away she comes back again meaner and angrier than before. And I see this happen, and I say to myself, There must be Justice.

"I'm only a policeman, Mister, but I'm telling you from my own experience, whether there's some kind of all-knowing, all-powerful God, I don't know—even if there is, it's no use to us. But I tell you, Somebody has to be greater and more just than we are. That's the certain truth, Mister. We can only punish, but there has to be a Somebody, somewhere, who can forgive. I tell you, Mister, truth and higher justice are just as strange as love."

—Translated by Norma Comrada

DETECTIVERSE

HAVE YOU HEARD THE LATEST?

by EMILY NEWLAND

Samuel P. Snoop, in Apartment 5B,
The most meddlesome man you ever will see,
Poked his nose in his neighbors' lives,
Spied upon husbands, tattled on wives,
Eavesdropped at doors and windows and walls,
Listened in on their telephone calls,
Spread rumors and gossip and outright lies,
Then, late last night, to his surprise,
Died quite suddenly in his bed.
"Natural causes," the coroner said.
"He choked on his pillow, 'twas karma, not crime."
But his neighbors know better—they were there at the time.

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DETECTIVERSE

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

by B. K. STEVENS

Linda taught herself what to do
To ensure her life was long,
And gladly showed all those she knew
Just how their ways were wrong.
She said, "Cholesterol clogs your veins
And smoking stops your breath,
Hard liquor leads to addled brains
And coffee causes death."
To help her weaker friends refrain,
She crushed cigars all day,
Poured booze and coffee down the drain,
And threw desserts away.
Her friends met one night to discuss
Linda's harsh view of life.
They raised some cash without much fuss—
Enough for a very sharp knife.
Linda learned next day, as she bled and bled,
The lesson of the shrew:
She was fit and healthy, but about to be dead
At the age of twenty-two.

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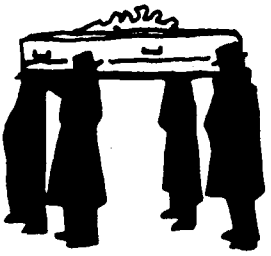

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a ***NEW*** **Rosetta Street story by**

JEFFRY SCOTT

"You can describe the man, then?" Detective Sergeant Nick Flinders prompted.

"There's a Great War poem," said Royle, "about soldiers caught in a poison-gas attack. One of them's said to look like 'a devil sick of sin.' Hey? Never forgotten that image. Well, it fits this chap. He threw his head back for a second and there it was—face so pale it shone, crooked black triangle for the mouth, holes full of darkness for the eyes . . ."

A DEVIL SICK OF SIN

by JEFFRY SCOTT

The headless man, understandably enough, gave Rex Royle a terrible shock. Ghosts are bad medicine, but a phantom in broad daylight is especially nasty. This one could have been fatal to Royle, for he nearly pitched over. Not recommended, since he was perched gargoyle-fashion in the tower of Old St. Asaph's Church, sixty feet above the cobblestones, at the time. But though he lost a couple of pencils and a perfectly good stub of charcoal, he managed to keep his grip on a pillar.

After a momentary pause, the apparition trotted on along Church Alley and thence out of sight, never thinking to look up. Of course, if it *had* been headless the matter was academic, since the jogger lacked eyes.

Such whimsicality made Mr. Royle a trying witness—not that he cared.

"Suddenly his head materialized, do you see. That was almost as nasty as him ending at the neck. Then I twigged that he'd been wearing one of those hood affairs and was peeling it off as he ran."

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"Must have been a relief," Detective Sergeant Nick Flinders suggested drily.

Mr. Royle, gaunt, shabby, looking every month of his sixty-nine years, snorted. "Don't be silly—it was *disappointing*. A ghost would have been a new experience, and they're unheard of at my time of life."

"A balaclava helmet," Detective Constable Spray muttered, frowning over his notebook.

"Rubbish," Rex Royle corrected sharply. "Wash your ears out, try listening. If he'd been wearing a balaclava I'd have said so, you blockhead. It was a ski mask, dark material, black or brown, so that it melted into the shadows of the alley, with no more than chinks for the eyes and mouth."

Tom Spray, though Cockney as the Artful Dodger, had olive skin, flashing brown eyes, and the temper often matching Latin coloring. Before he could object to the schoolmastery tirade, Nick Flinders struck in, "Excuse us a moment, sir," and drew the young man aside. "Kid gloves, Tommy. That video from the S&T's surveillance camera is damn nigh useless for ID purposes, but the guy was wearing a ski mask. This old buffer could be a diamond."

Earlier that day, an armed robber had stormed into the Great Northern Prospect branch of the Shield & Trident Building Society, getting away with £7,000. But that wasn't the worrying part. The raider had fired two shots from a handgun—not to overcome resistance, but to prove that he meant business, or perhaps because he relished shooting. Flinders wanted Ski Mask—and Detective Inspector Carr, a hard master, was absolutely determined to get him.

"*Flawed* diamond," D.C. Spray jeered. "Come on, he's older than God and probably not right in the head. What was he doing up on top of that church, anyway—preparing to fly south for the winter?"

Whether or not his sight was trustworthy, there was nothing wrong with Mr. Royle's ears. "I went up there for the view! I'm an artist—look!" Delving in the dingy canvas satchel, he produced a block of cartridge paper and slammed it down on the table.

Nick Flinders was impressed. Royle had studied Church Alley from aloft, capturing it with slashing strokes of charcoal and a few highlighting smudges of chalk. Nick fancied he could smell the place, feel its spirit.

"Nearly good," Royle grunted, mellowed by vanity. "If I'm spared, I want to bird's-eye-view the whole of this benighted parish all the

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way from Rosetta Street to Cap-a-Pie Lane and across to Great Northern Prospect."

"That's ace," D.C. Spray enthused, spoiling it by adding without malicious intent, "it could be a photograph."

Royle scowled and drew breath, but Flinders got in first. "Did you get a good look at the man, sir? When he took the mask off, that is to say? Did you see anything of his face?"

Royle was offended. "I always get a good look at anything worth looking at—it's what I'm for!" But Nick sensed that, suddenly, the artist was on the defensive. There could be any number of reasons. This was a part of London where people simply didn't talk to the police—out of tradition, peer pressure, or ambition to survive. Villains and fellow-travelers shut up for obvious reasons and honest citizens followed suit for fear of vengeance by the villains. If Rex Royle had been startled by an apparently headless man, then the C.I.D. had been equally taken aback when a member of the public volunteered information. On the other hand, his accent and manner suggested that Royle was not a local person, which might explain the anomaly.

"You can describe the man, then?" Flinders prompted.

"There's a Great War poem," said Royle, "about soldiers caught in a poison-gas attack. One of them's said to look like 'a devil sick of sin.' Hey? Never forgotten that image. Well, it fits this chap. He threw his head back for a second and there it was—face so pale it shone, crooked black triangle for the mouth, holes full of darkness for the eyes."

"You don't happen to know him?" Flinders hazarded.

"Never set eyes on him before," Royle answered, and there was no doubting his certainty. "But I'd know him again, never fear."

"Then you can give us the description," Tom Spray stated. "Height, color of hair—"

"Give me patience!" Royle's hands clenched in frustration. "I haven't an inkling how tall he was, and I *have* described him!"

Spray smiled nastily. "A devil, wasn't it? Dead helpful, that is. Now stop mucking us about, Dad. Get your thinking-cap on."

But, as Rex Royle reiterated with a certain amount of sputtering and strong language, he was unable to oblige. He'd know the man again, he could see the face in his mind, but he was unable to be specific.

Nick Flinders intervened. "Tell you what, sir—how about drawing your devil?"

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"Now you're talking, glad somebody has a grain of sense." Royle brightened, ripping the church-alley drawing from the pad and setting to work.

"Ah," Flinders acknowledged blankly when he passed him the result. A terrific drawing in its way, but it might be anybody or nobody.

"Right waste of time," Tom Spray asserted, having escorted Royle out to the street and come back. "Loonier than a Warner Brothers cartoon and thinks himself Lord Muck just because he's good at drawing. My kid sister's good at drawing, but *she* keeps a civil tongue in her head."

Nick Flinders was nipping out on that paradoxical quest undertaken by smokers—seeking a breath of fresh air and a packet of cigarettes—when the woman turned away from the information desk in the front hall. Large, tired blue eyes and a mass of complex yet faintly disarranged and patently false-colored hair gave her the air of a Barbie Doll left out in the rain overnight. "You've just scared me out of seven years' growth," she accused him good-humoredly.

"What's up, Doc?" he inquired, and Liz Holliday winced. With a surname and profession like hers, she'd heard that joke and others a few times before in the twelve years since leaving medical school.

She ran the district's busiest group practice and lived in a flat above the surgery in a mews off Cap-a-Pie Lane. "You kidnaped my father is what. He does tend to go walkabout and forget the time, but he swore to be back for lunch today—so when he was hours overdue I flew in here to report him missing."

"Mr. Royle's your father?"

"Before divorcing my ex-husband, I bought business cards in bulk, ten thousand of the wretched things. When they get used up, back comes my maiden name. Never mind that, is my dad in trouble?"

"Not a bit of it. It's just that he may have seen the bloke running away after the Shield & Trident holdup." Misreading her alarm, he assured her, "Not to worry, your father's fine—he wasn't involved in the shooting or anything."

Liz tucked her arm through his. "Walk me to my car." And outside: "Don't quote me to Dad, but whatever he told you may not be stone-cold reliable."

Nick's look made her go on. "Oh, he wouldn't lie—make something up to get attention." She shrugged miserably. "What it is, Mummy died a year ago and once she'd gone Dad started losing it—as we

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medicos say, in our pompous jargon." She tried for a brittle laugh, failing. "That's why I conned him into coming to stay with me for a few days. That was a month ago, and he'll never go back to Norfolk and rattle about in that house on his own if I can help it."

"I'm sorry, luv. He seemed okay just now, perfectly lucid in his way."

"Some days are better than others," said Mr. Royle's daughter. "Last week he woke me at one in the morning, telling me to get dressed so that we could catch the tide. Dad hasn't taken me sailing since I was at university, and we *are* rather far from the sea here."

Watching her rummage for her car keys, Flinders said, "I think he did see that feller, all the same."

"I'm not arguing. But don't pin any hopes on him turning up trumps at an identity parade. He might not know what you were talking about. Or what he reported to you today may have happened in nineteen forty-eight." Her eyes glistened. "He's a gifted man, he fought for his country, he gave me a flying start in life—and I just heard myself talking about him as if he were five years old and an irritating responsibility."

There was nothing Flinders could say. But something occurred to Liz, making her stall the car and wind the window down. "You won't be telling anyone about Dad being a witness—not anyone outside the Force, I mean?"

Nick got her drift.

"The only outsider who knows, apart from your father, is yourself. But you're right. Better warn him to keep his trap shut about the whole thing. Folk around here have a twisted idea of good citizenship. They might give him a hard time if they thought he was keeping bad company, such as me and my mates."

Doc Holliday pulled a mock-despairing face. "I'll try. Poor Dad, he hasn't got the hang of Rosetta Street—treats it like a Norfolk village. Have you seen his sketches?"

"They're terrific, Doc." And you're not so bad yourself, gel, Detective Sergeant Flinders added silently as she drove away.

Large, mechanized, and hi-tech as it has become, the Metropolitan Police still has its family side. The clan has thousands of members and they talk among themselves. Word gets around, and even if they have been banished to the equivalent of the attic or a shed at the bottom of the garden, veteran grandpapas and great-uncles catch

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snatches of conversation or, scanning a newspaper, read between the lines.

Detective Inspector Carr was nagging thirty-six hours after Ski Mask's foray when the desk sergeant put his head around the door. "Excuse me, sir, but Mr. Abbie dropped in—he generally brings me some wallflower plants this time of year, and he wonders if you could spare him a minute."

Carr made his dentures clatter. "Bloody old bore! Very well, if he must—" And swinging back into the hobbyhorse's saddle: "Information is all very well, Nick. I'm delighted to know that the raider fired two shots from a 9mm. self-loading pistol and we can prove it because the bullets have been recovered, but what I want isn't information—I want chummy arrested, charged, and off the street so a judge can worry about him."

"Amen to that, Inspector." The speaker was corpulent, with a strawberry nose and a voice deep enough to sound like barrels being rolled into a pub's cellar. Appropriately, he exuded a suggestion of Scotch, discreet yet as palpable as aftershave.

Frowning, Inspector Carr muttered, "Hello, sir. Come in, sit you down. You know Sergeant Flinders?"

"Man and boy these many years, John."

Nick Flinders kept a straight face. Ex-Detective Superintendent Hamish Abbie was a character—a card, with that indefinable knack of making the most banal remarks sound comical. Countless criminals had failed to see the joke, though—Abbie was a big drinker, puncher, and thief-taker.

"We're a bit under pressure, actually," Inspector Carr pointed out. "Always nice to see you, sir, but I'm afraid I must make it short and sweet."

Abbie planted his corduroy-trousered backside on a chair and beamed at Carr. "Me, too. The pubs have been open for half an hour and I'm parched for a drop of real London beer." He had retired in the 1970s to a smallholding in a Kent hamlet.

Leisurely as grass growing, though more irksome to Inspector Carr, the visitor rumbled, "Some of the lads came down to see me, hired a minibus for the occasion. It was my birthday and a good excuse for a jaunt to the Garden of England, or what passes for it these days, with a drink or three at the end of it.

"They happened to mention your spot o' bother at the S&T. Nothing indiscreet, no more than I could have heard on the radio, no

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loose talk. But it rang a bell and, seeing as I had plants to bring in, I decided to kill two birds with one stone."

Inspector Carr was only human, he couldn't help smirking as he patted a thickish wad of gatefolded paper. "Wasted trip, sir, not counting those wallflowers for Jack Gee. This is the printout from the computer, everything relevant to the case."

"Knitting-machine," Abbie scoffed, grinning evilly. "Put a penny in and it cross-refs for modus operandi, speaks your weight, tells your fortune. Get this, John: all I know is, chummy fired two shots for no good reason. That's what ticked my memory. I'll bet my pension that one shot went into a clock and the other smashed the telephone, more than likely, in an office visible from the public area, the customers' side of the counter. True or false?"

A hush fell for some five seconds. Then Carr groaned, "You know the MO, but the computer—"

"Only holds so much information, and its memory is patchy on account of it's an idiot," the veteran gloated, tapping his brow. "Your precious knitting-machine wasn't told about Ike Darcy's MO because he's been dead since five–six years before I retired. Soldier Ike, they called him. No glorious war record—he deserted, as a matter of fact—but he did love guns.

"Because he wasn't too bright, we underrated him. For, oh, mebbe three years, there was this run of armed robberies, solo villain. He'd do sub-post offices and shops and he always fired two shots to, like, get their attention and put 'em in the proper frame of mind—bloomin' terrified. One in a clock, the other in a phone.

"When I felt Soldier Ike's collar, I asked what *that* was all about. Simple, he says. Most shops and all post offices have a clock up on the wall and it makes a nice racket when you blow it to smithereens. The phone, that was to stop anyone ringing 999 the moment his back was turned—the idea of two shots raising the alarm all on their own never struck Ike. A bit of a loony. He never killed anyone, but that was more luck than good judgment."

Inspector Carr spoke plaintively. "I don't get it. This Ike Darcy snuffed it about thirty years ago and the two-shots stuff hasn't been done since then."

Nick cleared his throat. "The Super's saying—" he began, but Abbie boomed, "Shut your face, Sergeant. It's not often I get to be Sherlock Holmes and have a real live Detective Inspector with access to computers hanging on my lips. *I'll* tell him, it's *my* story.

"You're not a family man, John, so you're unaware how some

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things work. How d'you think half the local hounds learn their trade? Father brags, son listens." Abbie, covertly amused for reasons Nick couldn't account for, paused tantalizingly. "Ike Darcy had a son."

"That's it!" Inspector Carr yelped.

"Except," his torturer continued, "Ike's boy Ronnie slung his hook and emigrated to Australia—and I happen to know he hasn't been back since 'eighty-two, when I ran into him in the Railway Porter, top of Great Northern Prospect. He bought me a scotch for old times' sake. Ronnie never could stand his father—he loved it when I nicked Ike."

Racked by a dyspeptic spasm, Carr gasped, "Then what the devil are you telling us?"

"There's a bit more to Happy Families," Hamish Abbie chortled. "Father brags, son listens—and the grandson takes in more than either of them dreams. Just a toddler, probably, playing with his toys, they think he doesn't understand. Ronnie Darcy's boy got left behind. Ronnie's mother looked after him. Ida Darcy—she's over in that council place, warden-service flats at Beacon Street. I couldn't tell you the kid's name offhand, but I daresay it's the sort of thing his gran would know."

Except for a stiff leg, Mrs. Ida Darcy was surprisingly well preserved for her age—swarthy skin, coarse yet glossy black hair falling past the shoulders of her cheap sweater, and a hawkish, sloe-eyed face hinting at gypsy ancestry. "Nah, I ain't seen 'im since Chrissmus," she stated. "Rotten kids I got lumbered wiv, me. My Ron went orf to Orstrylyuh, dint 'e. You'd fink a son would send a bob or two, but I'm lucky if I get a birfday card one year outa three—and a month late at that. Fancy Orstrylian stamps on the envelope don't pay me bills. Arden's jussa same. Worse, really. My Ron is tight with his money, but Arden nicks the cash aht me purse."

"Arden Darcy, that's his name?" Inspector Carr pounced. He sounded skeptical—it was pretty fancy for a scion of Soldier Ike, the simple-minded gunman.

Ida Darcy sneered. "You deaf or sumfin? *Our Den,* I said. Dennis Darcy, after me bruv what got killed at Arnhem. Paratrooper, 'e was, bleedin' 'ero. Den dint take after *'im.* Timid as a girl."

"Sorry," the Inspector said meekly. "Dennis hasn't been to see you lately, and you are not expecting him, is that right?"

"Not much gets past you, Mr. Copper," she jeered. "Yeah, thasa size of it. Was your journey really necessary? No, it bleedin' wasn't."

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Carr looked so crestfallen that she added grudgingly, "If Arden ever does stir hisself to come and see his gramma, I'll tell him you was askin', orl right?"

Walking back to the car, Inspector Carr purred, "We're getting warm, Nick. That old bitch is lying through her teeth. Never asked why we're looking for Our Den—and note the elephantine cunning about telling us he wouldn't hurt a fly. Our Den is At It, and Ida knows—or has made a shrewd guess."

"Shiny new TV and video recorder, and a crate of Guinness in the kitchen," Nick agreed. "She had that delivered, I'll be bound, and Ida strikes me as your one-bottle-to-go type."

"Our Den has shared the spoils." Inspector Carr nodded. "We'll sling our hook now, because she'll be watching, but if I drop you round the corner, you can slip back and talk to the warden."

Later that day, Flinders reported: "The warden wasn't much help—but, yes, Dennis Darcy does show up at Ida's place at irregular intervals once or twice a month. Warden says he's average height and appearance, typical teenager, dark hair, leather jacket, jeans."

"Ida's bound to warn him off," Carr mused, "but that's only if she knows how to get hold of him. I've got the strength on Our Den—he's nineteen, unemployed, no fixed address. Department of Health and Social Security have no record of him claiming state benefits, so that's a dead end. Dennis Darcy has no form, but a social worker was called in three years ago after the boy attempted suicide. The Social Services lady has lost touch since, but she thinks Den sleeps rough, crashes with mates, or squats in derelict buildings."

"Watch Ida's flat, then?" Nick suggested. "None of my snouts have ever heard of Darcy, he's small fry."

"With a big gun," Inspector Carr amended sourly. He did mental arithmetic, picturing his duty roster. There were never enough people. "Surveillance on the grandmother's flat for the next four nights, then we'll see," he decreed. "The boy is half amateur, he lifted seven thousand quid so he'll be seeing himself as Britain's Most Wanted. Whether or not he knows *we* know about Ida's link to him, the kid will sneak in well after dark if he tries it at all."

That night, doing his duty as spy and eavesdropper, Detective Sergeant Flinders made a disquieting discovery.

The Calf with Two Heads is one of the neighborhood's oldest pubs, a pie-wedge-shaped Edwardian drinking factory where Cap-a-Pie Lane and Albany Row converge. Most passersby, making for the

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saloon or public bars, never try the apparently disused entrance from Albany Row, a forbidding-looking door whose handle and hinges weep rust. It leads into the ironically named Snug Bar. Nick had the bleak little Snug to himself that evening, which was the idea. Unseen, he could hear everything in the saloon bar just the other side of a stickily varnished matchwood partition.

When he tuned in, a pimp and the manager of a blue-movies parlor were in edgy debate.

"So what if he is an old geezer? Old enough to know better. It's right out of order, as you well know. Bad enough to be cuddling up to the Filth, shooting his mouth off. Silly old bastard, saying he can finger the guy on that Shield and Trident tickle. Can you imagine it? Not just a grass, mark you, but boasting about it! Somebody ought to teach him manners, old as he is." The blue-movie impresario's tone announced that he might well conduct the tutorial out of public-spiritedness.

"What's it to you if he does finger the bloke?" The pimp sounded truculently amused, with a breathy note of slipping temper. "Whoever pulled that one had bottle. Takes bottle, even if you are tooled up, to steam into what amounts to a bank, which is what your building-society branches are these days, and do the business on your own-some. Rules *you* out, Terry. You got less bottle than a temperance hotel."

Unkind laughter all round. But a third voice, measured, regretful, took up the theme. "S'all very well, but we can't have a bloody outsider charging around and stirring up trouble for one of our own. I mean, stands ter reason, it could be one of our own. It needs seeing to is all Tel is saying."

"Well, he can stop saying it," the pimp retorted. "Doc Holliday's a good lady, and she knows the score. She'd never let her dad do nothing stupid, whatever he's reckoning at the moment. Anything happens to upset Doc, I'll get the dead needle and treat it as personal. Leave the old toerag alone."

Flinders, padding out of the Snug as unobtrusively as he had entered, gauged the response as divided, and not the least daunted by the pimp's threat. Hardly surprising, since the man was puny, asthmatic, and a notorious coward.

Rex Royle had armed a time bomb and its clock might be running. We're always the last to know, Nick reflected bitterly, heading for Doc Holliday's flat. Evidently Royle had not kept his trap shut and now his role as witness was common knowledge . . .

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Within five minutes, he was explaining the latest state of play. It depressed him that his first sight of Liz Holliday's home should come when delivering bad news. He liked the place, with its medley of furniture ranging from old to older without any pretense to antique, a wall of books in the living room, and the faintest aroma of stew.

"The leak didn't come from our end, Doc. But the point is, word has got out. I could give you guff about protecting the old chap, but we couldn't maintain a guard for long, even if Inspector Carr sanctioned it. Best thing all round is to get your dad away for a week or two. Between ourselves, we have a good line on the gunman, and once he's off the street the fuss will die down." And that's a pious hope if ever there was one, Flinders heckled himself.

"Sit down and have a drink—you look exhausted." Liz poured him a glass of red wine. "Dad turns in early, he's sound asleep, but keep your voice down."

Flinders, no fashion expert, liked what she was wearing and wondered whether it was a housecoat. Something unsuitable for outdoors, anyway. What with that, and the intimacy of talking in murmurs—*Grow up,* he jeered at himself.

Liz, with a note of bravado, said, "The house rule is that when you've taken wine with me, I'm Liz. No more 'What's up, Doc?' next time we meet."

"Understood." He raised the glass. "This is, um, very tasty, Liz. Okay, what's the joke?"

"Sorry, it's just that bullshit isn't your thing, is it? You're supposed to spout stuff about an amusing little vintage." Mood-switching in an instant, she continued, "I begged my father to keep quiet, and in fairness he tried. But the vicar got him to run this art class for the pensioners' club and that's when his tongue ran away with him. He was lecturing about the difference between a good portrait and a good likeness, and laid the 'devil sick of sin' anecdote on his audience by way of illustration."

"Terrific. Load of old folk with nothing better to do than chat, and they love it when they have a good tale for a change, something that makes people sit up and take notice." Nick set the empty glass aside. "Hell of a world, Liz. Your father does the right thing and gets run out of town for his pains. All I can say is sorry. Too many holes in the dike and not enough thumbs."

"Cheer up, nobody's blaming you. I'll ring my aunt first thing tomorrow. She lives on the South Coast and Dad likes it there." She

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smiled at Flinders, a woman no longer youthful and never beautiful, but beautiful in his eyes at that moment. "Another glass of the tasty?"

"I'm working," he said slowly. "Um, when this is out of the way—"

"Yes. That would be good."

"Talk to you soon, then," he promised.

Which was sooner than he had imagined, because Liz Holliday's phonecall woke him three hours after he got to bed. "Not here!" was all he caught at first, having mumbled acknowledgment after salvaging the dropped receiver from under the fallen duvet.

"Who is this, what're you on about?" He squinted at his watch. It was five in the morning.

"It's Liz, Liz Hol—"

"Yeah, Liz. Sorry, I was groggy. What's the matter?"

"Dad. I got up just now to go to the bathroom and his bedroom light was on. He's gone out, Nick! Help me find him! Those beastly people hate him and—"

"Calm down," Flinders told her. "For starters, you stay put. He might wander back or he might phone you, it's daft to leave your place empty. I'll go looking and I'll get the lads looking. Chances are he hasn't gone far."

He heard what might have been a sigh or an explosive sob. "Thanks, Nick, I feel better."

"That's the way," he said gruffly, and hung up with a stab of alarm and embarrassment at how protectively tender he had felt, how schoolboy-proud that she was grateful.

Detective Constable Tom Spray said, "Because I say so, Sunshine."

"That's the way, pull rank even if it *is* nonexistent—typical CID."

DC Spray had been teamed with Constable Lawrence to keep watch for Dennis Darcy outside the grandmother's flat. Lawrence was a newly fledged, uniformed officer, loaned to Inspector Carr for a few hours. Loaned at the last minute, there had been no time for him to go home and change, but Lawrence believed that he was meeting the challenge of plainclothes. Actually he looked like a sulky police constable who was wearing an orange anorak over his blue-serge trousers, uniform shirt, and black tie.

It was six in the morning. They had arrived only a few minutes earlier because DC Spray had been detained on a matter of muggers preying on night-owl gamblers leaving a private club in Great

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Northern Prospect. PC Lawrence's thesis was that there was no point in keeping surveillance until seven in the morning when they had failed to be there for the theoretical seven hours previous to quitting time.

Slumped behind the wheel of his rust-spotted Ford Contina, Tom Spray said, "You got no gratitude, Lawrence. I'm earning you lovely overtime. Much more of this and you should be able to spring for a haircut."

"Hilarious."

Spray touched his arm. "Hey-up, who might this be?" They were parked among tenants' cars on a concrete apron opposite Winston Churchill House, where Ida Darcy had her flat. Anyone entering the flats was unlikely to check whether all the cars were empty, so Spray had accepted a restricted view past other vehicles.

They saw the pedestrian for half a dozen strides. Restraining Lawrence, Spray growled, "Why don't you stick your great turnip head out the window and give him a shout? We got feet, dimwit, we can stroll after him."

Belatedly, PC Lawrence found a flaw in their sighting. "That bloke was leaving, not going in."

DC Spray gave him an interested glance. No, the jerk was sincere. "Yeah, and if that's Dennis Darcy and we had been here when we was supposed to be, we might of seen him going in *before* he came out. No wonder they call you uniforms Woodentops." As Lawrence got out—at least he didn't slam the door—Spray instructed: "Sound carries this time in the morning and there's not many punters about. So start talking football to me, good and loud."

"I hate soccer."

"Women, then. You don't hate women, am I right?"

"A shape on her like you wouldn't credit," Lawrence brayed as they crossed Coronation Drive. "Not many of *them* to the pound, know what I mean?" At last DC Spray had found something the idiot was good at. Fifty yards ahead, the youth glanced back. Then he angled across the empty street; he might have been checking for oncoming traffic.

He was the right age, Tom observed. But not wearing a leather jacket and jeans. This one wore a brown warehouse coat and had a lunch tin under his arm, another wage-slave heading for work. Maybe.

Spray and Lawrence ambled across after the youth.

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"That's funny," PC Lawrence commented when they reached the corner. "What happened to him?"

Spray cursed and fumbled his personal radio from under his bomber jacket. "He clocked us back there and ran like hell first chance he got." His mixture of report and alert took under a minute. Still clutching the radio, he glared at the spokes of three deserted streets radiating from this section, running the street map through his head.

"Pound to a pinch of snuff, he's making for King Edward Green." PC Lawrence yawned.

"Shut up, can't you? —Why there? It's half a mile away."

"Not if you nip along Claremont Rise and use the railway bridge. He could make the Green in a minute or two up on his toes. Plenty of cover there, and the buses start from the north side of the park. Hide up, wait till the bus is moving off, and bob's your uncle." Lawrence slapped the detective on the back. "Us Woodentops got our uses, see."

"Shut up and run, you great berk!"

Rex Royle, grievously puzzled, sat on one of King Edward Green's park benches. Something was out of kilter, and it scared him. He wanted to be home with his wife. He'd left her only an hour earlier, surely, just before lunch. She wanted icing sugar to make a cake for young Liz's tea. Nice to have Liz back from university for the long vacation.

But somehow—Royle shivered and hunched his shoulders—it wasn't lunchtime but dawn or thereabouts. The bench was slick with dew. No sign of the village shops, either. "Bad business," he said severely.

Where in the world *was* he, and why was he here, for that matter? Royle closed his eyes, counted to ten, and opened them. He was still here, wherever it was—it wasn't a dream. Slummy sort of place, the grass mangy. One might do something with that sky, however. Impossible shades, but one could try.

"This will never do," he said aloud. Forget the sky. Ah, this was better, somebody approaching on the asphalt path. "An intelligent native," Royle always said, when they were lost in the car and wanted directions. It always made Liz laugh. She'd make a fine doctor someday, with her brains and her sense of humor.

Royle rose, shakily and creakily, his head swimming. The boy approaching was a youngster, a sickly-looking specimen. That brown

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coat had been made for a larger man. But he had an interesting face in its way. "Oi, hey!" Royle called as the youth showed signs of deserting the path on a shortcut to the distant roadway.

Tom Spray was learning the hard way that he was in lousy condition. Whereas had PC Lawrence been a racehorse, turf pundits would have said he was well within himself, loping along in the lead when they reached King Edward Green by way of its ornamental stone archway.

The attention of both policemen was drawn by Rex Royle's raised voice. Lawrence, seeing their quarry, called out in threat and triumph. Spray saw the old man, an arm upraised—warding off something, beseeching mercy?—and he shouted desperately. The result was that all four parties faltered for a split second, staring wildly at each other.

Nick Flinders was driving past King Edward Green on the off-chance of spotting Rex Royle. It was one of the area's few open spaces and he had been checking them all.

He couldn't hear shouting but a vivid orange blob flicked at his peripheral vision and then he saw two men, one with an elderly stoop and another near him, holding something that glinted in the growing light. Two others were racing toward them, that orange being the anorak one of them wore.

Muttering "Hold very tight please," as London bus conductors used to cry in his childhood, Nick sent the car over the sidewalk, his spine jarring as he jolted over the curb and then through the bushes fringing the park. He had to get to that group *now* and worry about the prized Escort's sump and muffler at leisure.

Rex Royle, neck corded with tension, heart fluttering, froze when the shouting erupted. The world had gone mad, the quiet park filled with raving, baying louts. The sickly-looking lad, cursing in a monotone, was now wrenching at the tin box he was carrying, kneeling to worry its stubborn lid. Then came a roar and the old man felt crumbs of asphalt pelt his shins and sting his cheeks. Opening his eyes, he found himself with his nose and toes no more than four inches from the side of a car.

Nick wasn't aware of alighting from the Escort and he hadn't the slightest idea where the other two men might be. Flinging himself at the youth in the brown coat, he was startled to encounter DC

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Spray and PC Lawrence attacking from another direction. Spray and Nick banged heads, Lawrence got kicked in the knee, the tin box went flying, and the brown-coated suspect was flattened in the scrum.

"You're nicked!" PC Lawrence kept roaring through a mouthful of turf, a death-grip on Spray's ankle. Flinders and Spray scrambled to their feet, Lawrence released his trophy with reluctance, and Nick handcuffed the youth.

He turned to Rex Royle. "You all right, sir—he didn't hurt you?"

"No, no, why on earth would he?" the old man stammered.

Nick took a moment to understand the bright-crimson spots on his tie and his shoes: his nose was bleeding. "Why?" he snuffled. "Meet your devil sick of sin, Mr. Royle."

Royle, thunderstruck, said: "Nonsense. I've never set eyes on this boy in my life."

"All's well that ends well," Inspector Carr claimed comfortably. "We don't need old Royle to ID Dennis Darcy. Darcy had his pistol in that box and it matches the bullets found at the S&T. Stupid kid is playing dumb at the moment, but the grandmother has hired Soapy Summers as his brief. Soapy will make the kid see sense: guilty plea, because Soapy knows we've got his client bang to rights, and with no previous convictions Darcy should draw a lighter sentence if he owns up. Could be out again inside four years." The Inspector rattled his dentures. "Unsatisfactory, but I'm not a vindictive man, Nick. I just want that little nutter off the street and away from guns—until next time."

Nick was thoughtful. "The ironic bit is, Dennis Darcy had no intention of harming Royle there in the park. He didn't know who the old boy was. It was just an accidental meeting."

Carr, grimly serious, contradicted him. "Not ironic, bloody lucky. Somebody up there likes Mr. Royle." In the top pocket of Dennis Darcy's warehouse coat, they had found a scrap of paper bearing Doc Holliday's address. The writing was not Dennis Darcy's, it was a female, semi-literate hand.

"Ida Darcy heard the chat about Royle, she told her grandson and directed him where to go looking. He was on his way to the only witness when Spray saw him. Why else would Darcy be out at crack of dawn with a loaded gun? There's a sort of cracked ingenuity there, Nick. Opposite Doc Holliday's surgery is Masterman's, the furniture-storage place—loads of fellers in warehouse coats in and out or

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hanging around. Our Den would have waited until an old chap came out of the side door from Doc's flat and shot him, I'm certain."

"Never make it stick," Nick commented regretfully. "Soapy would say we'd planted that address, or it was in the coat when Darcy nicked it. Come to that, why shouldn't a local man be carrying the address of the local doctor?"

Carr smiled by moving his lips, it was not genuine. "When Our Den graduates from grownups' jail in the early nineteen nineties, he'll bear watching. You read it here first." He became abstracted. Mentally he had moved on to the next logical thought: dikes and thumbs.

Rex Royle, elaborately casual, cocked an eye at Nick Flinders and stated, "I'm going off my head, you know. Senility—horrid word. That's why I made such a mess of things."

It was weeks after the headless man's appearance in Church Alley. Dennis Darcy had pleaded guilty and was awaiting sentence. Majority opinion had swung behind Doc Holliday's father. This had nothing to do with him recanting the identification of Dennis Darcy: most folk agreed that young Darcy had acted like a perfect prat, in which case grassing didn't count—the daft kid done it to hisself.

Flinders had called at the flat to take Liz out to dinner. Nothing grand, only the Chinese in Aldermaston Street. Tiger Beer was the stuff to drink with Chinese, any fool knew that, and he felt himself sound on the subject of lagers and associated brews.

"Leave it out, Rex. You made a mistake, we all do that. In a funny way, you helped us get that lunatic."

Not knowing that he had escaped assassination—Nick had not confided that part to father or daughter—Royle dismissed the remark as flattery. "My poor brain is past its sell-by date," he said, trying to be jaunty. "I *did* see Darcy running away that day, Nick, but the face under the mask—that was something else. Somebody else." He laughed humorlessly. "I've put it all together. I was a war artist, you know. In Germany, toward the end of 'forty-five, I saw a sniper dying. He had a mask on, too—a camouflage thing. One of our Medical Corps soldiers peeled it off to help the wretched man breathe easily. That was the face I told you about, the devil sick of sin."

"There you are, then—it wasn't like a delusion or whatever."

Rex Royle spoke with controlled violence. "But the ski mask and

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my sniper were a lifetime apart! I couldn't tell where one ended and the other started. I convinced you chaps because *I* was convinced."

And it damn nigh killed you, Nick thought. He was distressed to see the other man's cheeks were wet. He sat down by him on the couch and put an arm around the narrow shoulders. "Don't take on, mate. We'll look after you."

"It will get worse, I know it." Royle wasn't listening. It was to himself that he spoke. "Worse. But even when I don't know where I am or what's real, I can draw. I still have that."

Flinders, pins-and-needles in his arm, sat waiting for Liz to come out of her bedroom. She'd understand when he asked if she minded them staying in, after all. They could play Monopoly and Nick would cheat brazenly, which was guaranteed to tickle her father.

"Yes," Nick murmured, "you still have that."

DETECTIVERSE

QUITTING COLD TURKEY

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

A cigarette-puffing stockbroker,
The butt of a practical joker,
Lit the offered cigar
While refueling his car—
Pop! BOOM! He is now a non-smoker.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

The historical crime novel continues to attract both writers and readers to an unprecedented extent. Below are three new and admirable examples: a spy tale set in a relatively under-utilized period (Patrick), one of the better examples of the famous-historical-figure-as-detective school (Lovesey), and, sandwiched between them, a specimen of the rarest historical mystery variant of all.

**** William Patrick: *Blood Winter,* Viking, $19.95. Medical history and espionage combine in this enthralling and well written World War I thriller involving three virtually co-equal central characters: ailing Berlin homicide detective Andreas Schiller, American surgeon Eli Gordon, and German-American biological researcher Mararethe Riesling. From the great first chapter, with its gritty picture of wartime Berlin, you know you're in the hands of a master. (With recent developments in Eastern Europe, will the spy novel, like the western and the Regency romance, become a historical novel by definition? Probably not, but the unpredictability of events will probably send more and more writers at least temporarily into the past.)

**** Colin Dexter: *The Wench Is Dead,* St. Martin's, $15.95. The winner of the Crime Writers Association's Gold Dagger Award for best crime novel published in Great Britain last year finds Chief Inspector Morse using his hospital convalescence from an ulcer attack to investigate, *Daughter of Time*-style, an 1860 Oxford murder case. Of the types of historical mystery, this is not only the rarest but surely the hardest to do successfully: a pure exploration of a past crime with no sense of menace (save medical) in the present. Dexter, one of the finest current practitioners of the classical detective story, manages it admirably, in large part because the always developing character of Morse is so complex and fully fleshed.

*** Peter Lovesey: *Bertie and the Seven Bodies,* Mysterious, $16.95. In his second outing as a Victorian amateur detective, the Prince of Wales attends a shooting party and sees his fellow guests fall one by one, following the pattern of an old nursery rhyme. This is clearly Lovesey's homage to Agatha Christie, and the clever reader misdirection is almost as impressive as the tongue-in-cheek humor of Bertie's narrative.

**** James Yaffe: *Mom Meets Her Maker,* St. Martin's, $16.95. This is probably the best detective story of a career that started in *EQMM,* July 1943, when the author was only fifteen. The second novel about Mom (now relocated in a Colorado city where widowed son Dave works as an investigator for the public defender) is notable both for its

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puzzle, with a dazzling series of alternate solutions a la EQ and a dying message of unusual elaborateness, and for its depiction of the Jew's ambivalent situation in a predominately Christian society, specifically at that most ostensibly Christian season of the year, Christmas.

*** Warren Murphy: *Jericho Day,* Diamond Books, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709-0159; $17.95. A good paranoia thriller is always fun, and this is a *very* good one, alternating a present-day investigation into the titular conspiracy by fading radical journalist Lonzo Gates with the mid-1970s assignment of Assistant Attorney General Lucius Darling to figure out why the government keeps losing political trials. If you wonder why an author as famous as Murphy is publishing this novel with a relatively obscure Texas firm, the strongly right-wing perspective may have something to do with it. Whether you share Murphy's politics or not, you'll find his storytelling ability shines through the didacticism, and by the time you reach the twist-upon-twist conclusion, you won't be able to accuse him of a purely one-sided view.

*** Barbara D'Amato: *Hardball,* Scribners, $17.95. In her first hardcover mystery, D'Amato introduces a welcome addition to the ranks of first-person female sleuths, freelance journalist Cat Marsala. When an advocate of narcotic legalization is blown up at a University of Chicago sherry party, Cat is thrown first into the hospital, then into the investigation. The author does a nice job of integrating the legalization debate into the whodunit plot. One note on the debit side: stereotypical attacks on and abductions of the hero/heroine are a drag in many otherwise admirable mysteries—and they are especially tiresome in a book like this, with so much else going for it.

** Robert Bloch: *Psycho House,* TOR, $16.95. Norman Bates is long dead, but shocking murder returns to Fairvale when a local entrepreneur plans to turn the Bates Motel into a macabre theme park. Bloch, with his smooth readability, expert construction, shameless punning, and pointed social observation, is always fun to read, but a least-suspected-person killer that most readers will pick out early keeps this one from duplicating the impact of the original classic *Psycho* (1959) or its surprising sequel *Psycho II* (1982). (The latter refers to Bloch's novel, not the completely different movie version.)

** Erle Stanley Gardner: *Dead Men's Letters,* Carroll & Graf, $18.95. If Dashiell Hammett's *Black Mask* stories of the Twenties are enduring classics, and Carroll John Daly's are period pieces of historical interest only, Gardner's tales of Ed Jenkins, the Phantom Crook, fall somewhere in between. These six connected novelets from 1926 and 1927 display some of the mastery of pace and tricky plotting of the author's Perry Mason and Donald Lam/Bertha Cool novels, but the reader must be prepared for some unintended humor in the old-fashioned dialogue and prose that is sometimes closer to dime-novel

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than tough-pulp style. (The later pulp novelets gathered in the EQ-edited 1980 collection, *The Amazing Adventures of Lester Leith,* are much better—better, in fact, than the majority of Gardner's book-length works.) The book is most to be recommended for its sense of period, as Jenkins (conservative in his sexual behavior if in no other way) confronts the shifting standards of post-World War I morality—in the first story, he can't pry his eyes away from a flapper's knees. Gardner writes a great part for Clara Bow in every story.

** Isaac Asimov: *Puzzles of the Black Widowers,* Doubleday, $19.95. I count myself among those many readers who could no more pass up a new collection of Black Widowers stories than a bowl of mixed nuts. The character interplay and the learned conversation are a constant, and the tales ultimately rise or fall on the quality of their puzzles. This fifth collection (eight from *EQMM,* one from an original anthology, three new) finds the dining club generally below average form—stories like "Unique Is Where You Find It" and "The Lucky Piece" are good brain teasers, but the collection finishes weakly with puzzles too obscure ("The Four-Leaf Clover"), too obvious ("The Envelope"), or too farfetched ("The Recipe").

** Eleanor Boylan: *Murder Observed,* Holt, $15.95. In what must be the most unusual spinoff in detective-fiction annals, Boylan recaptures the genteel Manhattan milieu of her aunt Elizabeth Daly's Henry Gamadge mysteries (which first appeared through the Forties and into the early Fifties), with Henry's widow Clara as the sleuth. In her second case, Clara's first-person narration offers some nice touches, and most of the characters are enjoyable company. The puzzle, though, is relatively thin and comes up a twist or two short.

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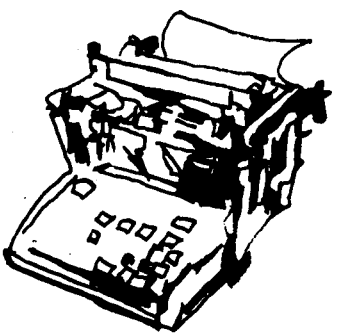

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a *NEW* Grijpstra and De Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Frank raised a hand. "Whoa, Fats. Whiskey. American. Ice, no water."

"Sir," the bartender said, "the name is Edmond."

Our first story from Janwillem van de Wetering in far too long. (One reader wrote on his or her EQMM Readers Award ballot: "What happened to the Dutchman? I miss him.") The first story about Amsterdam police detectives Grijpstra and De Gier in even longer. They don't show up until the end of this intriguing, insightful story, but they are, of course, well worth the wait . . .

HUP THREE

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Handsome, successful Frank Nullish and his brand-new superautomatic Volvo had a choice that fateful day. They could take a left turn after leaving the clinic where Frank's wife Betty-Baby wasn't being cured and go home. Home was Frank's spacious top-floor apartment in a four-story condo in the luxury suburb of Amstelveen. The apartment overlooked a well kept park lined by ramrod poplars and ever mown lawns surrounding a clear pool with shiny white Peking ducks on top. Left turn was nice—the Volvo would sit in its underground garage and Frank, teeth clenched on the old meerschaum, would watch ducks from the balcony, Cat hanging bonelessly across his arms.

Frank smoking, Cat purring. Ducks quacking down below.

A right turn was not so nice, meant getting caught up into a web of narrow one-way streets, crescenting alleys, steep bridges that led into the inner city of Amsterdam, originally of Seventeenth Century gable-housed splendor, subsequently abused by the greed of com-

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merce, recently revamped as a quaint old-worldly center, of interest to tourists and pleasure-seeking locals, a region of hup-ho, hanky-panky goings on.

There was a choice: left/right. The Volvo turned right. Frank smiled happily for a moment, then worriedly for more moments.

Frank liked to see himself as a detached introvert, a homebody who's got it together, a lone watcher of ducks. His wife Betty-Baby watched lonely TV, but that was a while back now, before she got too sickly fat and was hospitalized in the private clinic. A brief daily visit, after work, to his ailing wife was part of the detached introverted got-it-together loner's life, and not a bad life at all.

How long had Betty-Baby been away now? Frank calculated, reaching for figures and dates, payments of medical bills going out, insurance payments coming in. While he calculated, the Volvo waited behind a truck that burped up foul smoke.

Frank pulled his sun roof shut. The truck's rattling exhaust burping oil-smudged air into the Volvo's vents hardly bothered him, of course. No point in fretting about unavoidable aggravations when things are going good. Frank smiled sagely at the truck's enormous rear doors that denied him passage and view.

The truck moved. The Volvo didn't as yet, but then it did, with Frank nodding via his rearview mirror at the angry driver behind. She filled a small car. The car beeped, the truck burped. Frank laughed out loud.

Things still couldn't be better. Wasn't he making a fortune on what Betty-Baby's dad once called "our modest but profitable lines?" The lines consisted of specialized hooks and needles used in art needlecraft by rich ladies with a need to embroider cushion slips, prepatterned wall hangings, bellpulls to summon servants that had left, keyboard covers for pianos nobody played. There had to be quite a few of them, Frank thought: bent-over grannies and aunts in slipping wigs and shoulder scarves, buying the strangely adapted hooks and needles that his company turned out so diligently. All the products had been hermetically patented. The machinery making them was paid for years ago. Quantities weren't big enough for big business to even consider worrying about. An easy little product, a high margin, no competition, a steady, abundant flow of cash into Frank's company.

His company? Well, Betty-Baby's dad's company, but the old man kept forgetting his own name these days. It was okay when Wuffo the dog lived, for Wuffo brought her doddering master home after

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walks. But Wuffo herself got old and forgetful, too, then died, so the old man went to the nice nurses in a nice home, fulfilling nice needs. Frank signed the nice checks with pleasure. With power-of-attorney passing to son-in-law Frank and only child Betty-Baby ailing, who owns what?

But there was another question just now that got away. Catch the question, Frank. How long has Betty-Baby been sick? Maybe three months? Is she missed? She is not missed. Mostly invisible housekeeper Mrs. Bakker keeps good house. May the good life go on forever. So why the Volvo's wrong turn? Why this almost uncontrollable anger all of a sudden? Wherefrom this glowing desire to step on the gas and ram the smelly truck, shift gear, and reverse into the little beepy car?

Hey, a parking space ahead between elm trees at the side of a canal. Get in there. Don't worry about signals. Ignore the little car's wagging lady finger. While you're at it, ignore the lady lips mouthing "Asshole."

Frank, getting out of his vehicle parked inches from the canal's quay, recognized his surroundings. Formerly the company was located here, before the inner city exchanged grimy business for glitzy pleasure. Now the refurbished merchant mansions, warehouses, and workshops held cozy bars, tourist hotels, arty galleries behind spiffed-up gables. Frank checked his watch. Galleries would be closing by now, bars would be very much open. What now? Guzzle a gallon?

Frank hadn't guzzled in years. Guzzling requires buddies, good old boys who shout welcomes and thump you around a bit before opening up the inner circle. Frank remembered himself as "Tarzan," raising a tulip-shaped glass of juniper-flavored gin to toast mustachioed and earringed "Pirate," squat, military-dressed "Stinky," and a bartender known as "Saturated Fats." Twenty years ago, these were important people on Frank's stage. The stage collapsed, the actors wafted away—not quite, though, for Frank recalled running into Pirate again recently, and the new image, bald-faced and with no earrings, cheerfully mentioned one wife, three kids: "The five of us, Tarzan, having breakfast every day."

"The three of us, Pirate," Frank could have said. But Frank, huddled in his British raincoat, with his dry-blown hair wavy in the breeze, didn't say that. It wasn't true, anyway. Betty-Baby and Cat didn't breakfast, but slept in, snoring gently, hand in paw, while

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Frank gobbled precooked and slurped instant in the living room, one eye checking the paper to see how his stocks were doing. Not that they were ever really doing. Dutch boring beer and boring banks, electronics, oil. As permanently safe as the royal Netherlandic House of Orange.

If the shares dip, wait five minutes. Up they pop again.

"Still drink beer, Pirate?"

"No. No beer." The man receded into the crowd, on his way to smilingly earn more tribal breakfasts.

Frank, standing between the Volvo and a doggie-crusted elm tree, faced a cinema poster showing a nude woman approaching a warty alligator. See the movie? But shouldn't he have dinner first? Grab a nuked bite somewhere close? Why not go home and share one of Mrs. Bakker's filets mignons with Cat? Sauteed chanterelles on the side? Cheese and crackers for leisurely afterward? Real whipped cream on fresh fruit? Java coffee? Cuban cigar? View of the park? Another pleasant evening watching more ducks? What was he doing here in this hole of hell?

General Frank curtly ordered himself back into the Volvo. The troops demurred, said "Nah."

Frank wondered whether a woman was wanted, perhaps. There should be quite a few bare-shouldered, bare-legged, bare-bosomed women waiting in the alleys all around, framed by neon tubes, illuminated erotically by pink- or purple-shaded spotlights hidden under window sills: a multicolored selection.

Frank muttered defense to himself. You're not in your right mind today. You want to get sick?

He tried compromise. Take out a blue movie and stick it into the VCR at home. But the saints kept marching on, on narrow sidewalks behind phallic metal posts installed by the city two feet apart to protect peaceful citizens from bad traffic. He touched the posts' smooth tops gently, begging off their urge. He passed bars filling up with bright young people. Being forty years old was bordercase, maybe? Wouldn't his clothes make him stand out?

He stopped in front of a small store, put on rimless gold-stemmed spectacles, and appraised his looks mirrored between the window's display of high-heeled boots, shoulder bags, and other leather items for gay tourists. His light-grey three-piece suit seemed fine. Silk-maroon tie? Nice. Button-down pure-cotton pink shirt? Neat. Hair? Thinning, sure, but still covering well. Frank frowned. Why would

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he concern himself with being accepted by little people? Wasn't he the country's monopolist of profitable needlecraft hooks and needles?

He walked on, stubbing toes on cobblestones, limping for a bit. He recognized the gable he leaned against. It shielded the patrician's mansion where he had started work twenty years ago, fresh from business school, for Betty-Baby's father. A while later the building was sold and the company moved to the modern business park on the city's outskirts where he bossed it around today, but it was here Frank's career started.

Frank laughed too loudly, then frowned furiously. Why was he out of control if he hadn't started drinking yet? He clearly heard the opening line of a sad jazzy tune. Did the music originate in a sound system active within the building or was old Frankie cracking up? He shook his head to get rid of a depressing but fascinating ballad, played on a row of double basses handled by tall men with hollow eyes.

In order to rid himself of these frock-coated musicians, Frank appealed to the wall he leaned against, feeling it tenderly with his fingertips. He remembered the building as a ruin, but now its surface had been filled in and varnished, its doors repainted, its rotted windows replaced. The tall mansion's imposing entrance showed seven brass pushbells with elegantly lettered nameplates, one for each story. So there were apartments now, instead of Betty-Baby's father's tatty office, the clerking rooms, and storage for finished product. The basement, where machinery once thumped and stamped, had become a bar.

Frank rethought himself into the nineteen-year-old bright young fellow finding his gateway of success here. Stepping through—stepping right into it. Into marriage, too.

He didn't know about Betty-Baby then, about the sole heir. Betty-Baby was learning manners in a Swiss college at the time, but about to return to provide her entrance, too.

Stepping through.

Did you arrive? Frank asked Frank. How do like the other side?

I do. I do, Frank told Frank.

Now he was rich, and Betty-Baby was nuts. Frank, waiting for the electricity in his toes to subside and the gloomy bass players to finish their tune, saw the face of Betty-Baby's doctor. "Physically," the face said, "there's nothing wrong with your wife." The face smiled. "My colleagues are in full agreement, of course." So what

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about Betty-Baby's itching, stomach cramps, dragging leg, weight problem, breathing troubles?

"I would like to recommend a psychiatrist, Mr. Nullish."

Frank pushed himself off the wall, stubbed his toes again, staggered backward into a passerby, turned around, apologized.

"Join AA," the passerby said. "They're boring blowhards, but can be helpful at times."

"Yes," Frank said.

"They sure helped me." The passerby said, pointing at the bar's entrance close by. Frank noticed a strong smell of gin coming from the bar and the passerby's mouth. "I can resist the attraction now," the passerby said, holding up a stubby chin. "I don't have to enter the bad places any more. I can go home." His red-rimmed eyes squinted. "Okay?"

"Yes," Frank said.

Sure Betty-Baby was crazy, just like his brother Pete and his wife Suzie. Another story of success. Pete, through Suzie, stepped into a sole agency for Japanese dike-repairing machinery. Suzie tired of exercising her credit card in shopping centers and started seeing a shrink. Pete was invited to show up, too. Pete came to Frank. There was Pete, in Frank's office, silhouetted against the showcase filled with needlehooks and hooked needles.

Pete's face shone with the sweat of fear. "Shrink wants to make me crazy, too, Frankie. Not me, Brother, not me. Liberty for me." So Pete bought himself a plastic replica of a Duesenburger 1931 convertible and picked up girls in the inner city to go sailing with in his plastic mini-schooner.

We have all gone crazy, Frank thought.

If he could ever have known that he would be selling needlecraft hooks for a living—being useful to old ladies at eight times cost. It was a good thing he didn't believe in heavenly justice. As long as he didn't believe, he wouldn't have to amuse Saint Peter.

Saint Peter: What did you busy yourself with down there, sir?

Frank: Eh—with making money?

Saint Peter: Is that so, sir? Specifics?

Frank: Yes. Well, I kind of cornered the market for hooked needlecraft needles, the kind with those little chromium-plated catches at the end, you know? Mahogany handles?

Saint Peter: What else did you do, sir?

Frank: Eh—nothing?

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Saint Peter, leading a choir of angels wielding flaming swords: Hahahahaha.

They probably wouldn't even bother to shove him into hell, but cruelly ignore him instead—let him wander about like he was wandering about now.

Frank wandered into the bar. The bartender reminded him of Saturated Fats, but this was a younger man, although even more blubbery, more overflowing his pants. The bar was antiqued—seats and counter stained in yellowy browns and shotgunned into worm holes under sagging smoked-over beams carrying a partly whitewashed ceiling. Teak wainscoting added for elegance. A copper rail lined the bar for parking unsteady footsies on. Spittoons in all corners.

"Draft?" Saturated Fats II said, sliding a mug toward a tap.

Frank raised a hand. Beer is for canals, comes out like it goes in, without even being polite enough to change color. "Whoa, Fats. Whiskey. American. Ice, no water."

"Sir," Fats said, "the name is Edmond." He wasn't reaching for the beer tap any more. He wasn't reaching for anything.

"Edmond," Frank said, gently edging forward to reach a barstool between Longhairs smooching on each other and Cleavage in a lace blouse being stared into by man with Loose Teeth. "I am sorry, Edmond."

Edmond's bellies cascaded. "You wouldn't just be saying that, sir?"

"No," Frank said.

"Not sorry?" Edmond asked.

"Yes, sorry."

Edmond poured from a square black bottle and moved ice about with a silver stirrer. Frank smiled. He hadn't been drinking for a while. Or smoking. Now he would smoke again, too. He looked at the tobacco display behind the bar and pointed at Black Belgians. Edmond opened a pack, tapped out a cigarette, pushed a candle across.

Frank coughed, waved the loosely stuffed cigarette through dense smoke, and coughed again.

"Being bad?" Cleavage asked, ignoring Loose Teeth's protest.

"Sir?" Edmond asked, half closing his eyes in disgusted disbelief. "Sir? Could you arrange the denture?"

"What *is* this?" female Longhair asked, watching Loose Teeth's coated tongue frantically trying to correct the position of his overturned denture.

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"Fellini," male Longhair said.

Within the third bourbon and the fifth Black Belgian, Frank found himself afloat on pure joy. A flashing insight promised that he could step back to the exact moment that marked the beginning of his wrong direction. The step had to be in time only, for his present location was right. The exact moment happened right here, twenty years ago. Up until then, the time was fine.

What good times were coming back! Nothing to care about then. Young Tarzan hangs out in happy jungle, rides the magic streets of Amsterdam on his shiny Harley Davidson, lives in an attic listening to Dizzy Gillespie on LP. He wears corduroy pants, a leather jacket, no tie. He goes for Jane.

"Me Frank, you Ravena."

"*Ha!*" shouted Frank, banging the bar with both hands. "Ha!"

"Sir?" Edmond asked.

"Edmond," Frank whispered, "Edmond, I thank you. This magic third drink, the house drink, is showing me what's what. Thank you, Edmond. Have one on me." He raised his glass. "Hup one." He raised it higher. "Hup two." He put it to his lips. "Hup three." Immediately there was a third flash of insight. Find Ravena. Things had gone wrong after Ravena, so he would have to get back to Ravena to start again. How simple. Bring her magic presence back into his life. Start again. Total turnaround in two easy steps. "Edmond? Got a phonebook?"

Ravena wasn't listed.

Frank rested his hand on the page. He was doing well back then, before turning right instead of left. True to type, daredevil type, young Frank had faced Betty-Baby's dad in his gloomy office. The old man lectured about attitudes, about young Frank's double-exhausted, rumbly, wide-handled, all-victorious American Harley Davidson motorcycle. Betty-Baby's dad explained that an employee being trained for business management shouldn't be imitating Marlon Brando. Betty-Baby's dad, in his pinstripe suit, made weighty words flow heavily.

But did young Frank Nullish pay attention? He did not. He was looking at Betty-Baby's dad's new secretary's long light-brown legs with tightly curved calves, her supple body in a short skirt and tight blouse, elegant hands poised above the Remington's keys, dark eyes, raven-black hair.

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Frank had met Ravena in the corridor that day. They held hands briefly. He secretly read her application letter in the clerks' room. Born in Borneo? Frank saw palm leaves, heard parrots screech and the slow flap of foxbat wings, an exaggerated sunset splashed in blood-reds and soft-orange tinting slowly, giving way to silver shades as the full moon sails in. Ravena steps out, naked but for a batik loincloth. Shell anklets click. The Remington's keys click. Betty-Baby's dad had spoken and Frank is sent off to sell the bike, get a decent suit, behave, remember the future.

But not yet.

Frank stepped out of the past for a minute to enjoy more bourbonically clear insights. "Edmond?"

The square black American bottle poured more clarifying potion.

Frank sucked insightful black smoke, reentered the past.

Betty-Baby's dad went off on a business trip. Frank bought six yellow tulips and had a student clerk deliver them to the presidential chamber. The messenger, for a small consideration, promised not to say that the tulips were bought by Frank. Mystery goes with true love.

Next move. Meeting in corridor.

"Would you like to have dinner with me at the Chinese restaurant of your choice?" future executive Tarzan asked secretarial Jane.

"No." She brushed past him. Her huskily vibrant voice made him see birds-of-paradise spreading brocade wings, a pouched tree kangaroo pogosticking across a glade, giant orangutans tossing banana peels, a tiger partly hidden in bamboo shadows.

Of course. This Dayak (he remembered Borneo headhunters from a geography lesson) princess was too exotic to give in easily. His own shameless hurry disgusted him. How could he even dare to expect so much so fast?

Next day, another six yellow tulips.

Waited for her in the street. Offered to take her home on the Harley's saddle, designed for maximal physical contact.

She preferred public transport.

A day passed. More anonymous tulips were accepted but every direct approach got blocked by curt refusals. Maybe she thought he was too young. Frank checked Ravena's application again.

She was twenty-three years old, against his nineteen. But what the hell? The mature princess and the ardent young prince. Possibilities were still endless. The form also gave an address. He rode

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out on his Harley. She had her own mini apartment with a front door and private steps. She wasn't home.

The clerks were low people, caught in drudgery, scribbling all day before grinding home on rusty bicycles. Frank refused to laugh at their crude jokes. He wouldn't go out with them for coffee breaks, reading avant-garde poetry at his desk instead. Resulting hostility exploded into a nasty joke. A clerk sidled up. "Say, Frank, been on the roof yet?"

"No."

"Come with me—you should see the view."

"Okay."

There were small hinged steps leading to a skylight the clerk obligingly unhooked. "You go first, pal," he said.

The minute Frank reached the roof, the trapdoor behind him slammed shut. Underneath, there was mumbling and laughing. "Nice view, what?" clerky voices asked. The view was not nice. Frank could see other roofs and bare trees reaching up sadly. Ragged washing dried on sagging lines. A rear garden displayed heaped garbage between slimy tree debris. The roof's streetside showed grumbling traffic, released by a green light.

Frank waited minutes. The skylight stayed shut. Rain drizzled coldly. He squatted so that he could hear better and heard Ravena's soft laugh. She, too.

Angry, he was angry—but anger alone wouldn't break his trap. He walked away from the trapdoor to the edge of the roof, where fear of height stopped him.

The laughing voices underneath the skylight egged him on. He jumped to the next roof, across a narrow but gaping depth. His smooth leather soles made him slide and he almost toppled backward, but managed, by mowing his arms around windmill-fashion, to stay upright. He forced his trembling legs to inch toward the edge of the next roof. Seven stories down a rear garden covered with junk pushed against a sagging fence. Under the gutter near his feet, a window had been left open. If he—but, no, he couldn't accept the challenge. Say he swung from the overhanging gutter forward and backward once—twice, maybe—trying to work up momentum to propel his reluctant body into the window? What if the gutter broke, dropping him down into rotted-out boxes and rusted bicycle frames a hundred feet below?

So, back to the skylight, kneel and knock, beg the clerky people for mercy?

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Never.

Fresh bright-orange streaks of fury burst through Frank's brain and burned away most of his fear. He hung from the gutter, after careful squatting that, because he began to slide again, brought him quicker to the edge than he dared to. So far, so good. His fingers slid through the gutter's gooey contents before grabbing hold. Sooty leaves creamed in messo of bird. So far, so better. Now for the best part, swinging Tarzan-style. The tension made him grin. Pity he had forgotten the apeman's war shriek. But he could make up his own. *Yuuu-aayuuuuh?* There we go. Hup ONE! Hup TWO!

At hup three, his fingers released the gutter, his body shot through the window, and his heels aimed for and hit the floor. The room contained a bed, a chest of drawers, a washstand. There were no signs of an occupant. A boarding-house room, waiting for the next guest? Frank slid on worn linoleum, slowed down to a casual walk, left hand in trouser pocket, opened a door, followed a corridor, descended narrow stairs. He lived here and was on his way out for a stroll. If he met anyone, he'd say, "Hello—how are you doing?" noncommittally but friendly enough, and meanwhile keep going.

Descending floor after floor, he met no one. The street door opened easily. Outside, he turned back to the office.

There they were, all the king's men and woman, waiting gleefully for Frankie's pleas from above to open the skylight, waiting for Frankie's surrender.

Frank quietly joined the giggling crowd, maneuvered himself next to Ravena, and took her slender hand. She looked up at him, her dark eyes gleaming. "You! Where did *you* come from?"

"I flew."

That was all he would ever say about his feat, even to Dayak princess Ravena, even to Jane of his private jungle.

Ravena often asked him about the miracle when he lay next to her in the wide bed of her apartment, opened to him after the clerks' defeat. He stayed with her until Betty-Baby's dad moved him to associates in Paris for a while to learn tricks of the trade. While Frank was away, Betty-Baby's dad sold the building and moved the company to modern premises.

He also got rid of Ravena. She wrote to Frank in Paris, mentioning another lover, a man with a sailboat who might take her far away unless Frank came back at once to take her even farther. He didn't go back at once, and when he eventually did Betty-Baby's dad made him crown prince.

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Rumor reached him that Ravena got dumped off the sailboat somewhere and came back to Amsterdam, but Frank didn't see her again. He saw pink, dimply Betty-Baby instead, who bought him the condo. Years slipped by. There was no reason to hunt about in the alleys of his past.

Until now.

Frank studied the phone book. No Ravena Simons. Sam Simons—would that be Ravena's brother? He dialed.

"Frank Nullish," Frank said. "Remember me, Sam? I used to be with your sister."

"Sure," Sam said. "You're rich now, Frank?"

Frank nodded.

"What?" Sam said.

"Yes."

"I'm poor." Sam gave the number.

Ravena's voice was low and vibrant.

"This is Frank Nullish, Ravena."

The silence was low and vibrant.

"You remember me, Ravena?"

"I remember you, Frank."

"So how are you doing?"

"Well—" she said. "Okay, I guess."

"That's nice," Frank said. "Meet me? Now? Here?" He gave her the bar's address. She said she needed half an hour.

Frank dipped the tenth Black Belgian into the fifth bourbon and inhaled alcoholic nicotine. Ravena came in. She wore a silk orange-red suit and her hair down, hiding most of her face. What he saw of her skin had wrinkled. She'd be forty-three. The hand that clasped his was clawlike, the claw of the bird-of-paradise.

So what? Old Ravena. Me old Tarzan. You old Jane.

A lovely lady. A matured exotic. They'd start over, build a gazebo in a banyan tree, turn the lights low, spray perfume. Keep an ape.

Edmond's chins trembled. "What would the lovely lady like to imbibe?"

Ravena ordered whiskey.

Edmond's pudgy hands manipulated the square black bottle with ease and abandon.

"How nice that you phoned," Ravena said.

She needed more whiskey to say more. She told Frank she had a daughter, who left and wasn't doing well, and that she had no man,

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except Uncle Joe. She lived close by. She hoped Uncle Joe had not followed her.

"Is there an old man, looking in?"

Frank asked Edmond. Edmond said there was. "His head shakes."

"Parkinson's disease," Ravena said.

"Very old," Edmond said.

"Eighty," Ravena said. "He gets nervous without me."

"In shirtsleeves," Edmond said.

"He should be wearing a jacket." Ravena excused herself and went outside. Frank saw her admonishing a shabby old man, marching him off. Uncle Joe's bald head shone like a reluctant moon, his arms swung widely.

She came back after a while. "Naughty Uncle Joe. I put him to bed. He'd better stay there." She looked at her empty glass. It filled up again. The bird-of-paradise claw touched Frank's arm. "How about you, you got kids?"

"I married Betty-Baby," Frank said. "No kids. It isn't working out. She's sick all the time."

"The company is hers?"

"In her name," Frank said.

Ravena nodded. "So all your property is Betty-Baby's."

He nodded, too. "In a way, in a way, but I'm starting over again." He touched Ravena's shoulder meaningfully. "I phoned *you*, you know. Can we go somewhere?"

"Uncle Joe will be nervous," Ravena said. "It's better in the morning. He sleeps late. We have a big apartment."

"Uncle Joe's apartment?" Frank asked.

Some gold in her teeth gleamed. "In a way, in a way." She looked up. "There's a hotel nearby. But tomorrow would be better."

Frank overpaid Edmond. Outside, they both stubbed their toes on cobblestones on their way to the Volvo.

Frank drove off carefully, aware of possible police and Uncle Joe in his mirror. "Which way's the hotel?"

"The other way." She looked over her shoulder. "Oh, dear, he got out again. Stop the car."

Uncle Joe's face pressed against Ravena's window, mouth moving like a fish about to die in the bottom of a boat. "Ravena, where are you going?"

"I'll have to go with him," Ravena told Frank. "Phone me tomorrow morning, we'll work something out . . ."

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"No?" Edmond asked when Frank sat down again. "Last drink? I'll be closing soon."

The black bottle did its job. "You sure you like that lady?" Edmond asked. "I've seen her here before. Got to know her, so to speak."

"Tried her out?" Frank asked. "One morning, Uncle Joe still asnooze?"

Edmond winked. "Now now, sir, now now."

Frank stood next to the Volvo. A copcar stopped. "You wouldn't want to be driving?" the copcar's loudspeaker whispered.

Frank crossed the quay again, tentatively pushed the building's door leading to the apartments. The door would be closed, of course, but wasn't. He climbed all seven flights of stairs, reached the skylight, lowered its steps, walked up the steps, pushed, reached the roof. The roof was still old, with peeling tar sheets showing decayed tinplate and moldy gutters.

Frank was happy. He was back, he had reached the starting point. He would jump to the next roof, slither about, squat down, be a hero again. He would dig his fingers in the juicy contents of the rotten gutter, lower himself, swing his rejuvenated body into the neatly made bed of the boarding-house room below, Ravena's bed, and they would fly off together on bird-of-paradise wings, away from the battlefield where pathetic clerks' corpses stank pitifully.

Hup one. Hup two—

The gutter broke.

"Yuuu-aayuuuuh!"

"Can we take him now, Adjutant?" one of the paramedics asked the portly police detective. "We haven't got all night."

"Wait," the younger detective with the wide moustache said. "Wait, Grijpstra, tell me again why we shouldn't investigate the corpse and location further. I know you told me before, but you were eating that hamburger." He glared at the paramedics. "You guys wait, okay?"

"Sergeant De Gier," Adjutant Grijpstra said, "you've been upstairs. There are tracks on the roof, the victim's tracks only. The subject jumped off all by himself. Accident? Accidents are okay. Suicide? Suicides are okay."

"Prints say the subject hung from the gutter by his hands," Sergeant De Gier said. "As his swinging broke the window's glass, I may surmise that the subject was attempting to swing himself into

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the room below. Maybe he was a burglar and a rapist. Maybe he's listed and we can now cross him off our list."

"You checked the subject's wallet," Adjutant Grijpstra said. "Credit cards, cash, valid driving license, papers that go with the Volvo parked at the quayside. Photograph of a large lady. A Boucheron gold watch. A Leyden House suit. The subject's visiting card calls him managing director of a corporation making needlecraft needles. The company's name is known to me. My own mother and my own ex-wife use those needles. They're good needles. You still say he may be suspect?"

"There was a woman in the apartment the subject didn't get into because the gutter he was hanging from broke on him," De Gier said. "He tried to enter the woman's room intending badness maybe. She saw him swing in and pushed him out again."

"Self-defense is kind of okay," Grijpstra said. "But it wasn't self-defense. Why not? Because the woman says so. She was asleep in another room, heard the glass break, heard someone shout *"aa-yuuuuh,"* opened the broken window, looked down, saw the body, and phoned us. We confronted her with the body. She says she never saw the subject before."

"She lied?" De Gier asked.

"Ugly women have no reason to lie," the second paramedic said.

The sergeant thought. "Yes. So why did he force himself into a fatal accident, this handsome, well dressed, still youngish, reputable needlecraft-needle-business-owning subject?"

"Who cares?" Grijpstra asked. "Fatal accidents are okay."

De Gier's sensitive brown eyes shone pleadingly. His moustache curled in gentle protest. His perfect teeth showed in a humble smile. *"I* care," he said.

"Please," Adjutant Grijpstra said pleadingly. "The subject is some forty years old. He is doing fine. He has been making and selling needlecraft needles for years. He is looking at selling even more needlecraft needles for even more years. But why? He already has a Volvo and a Boucheron watch. He is beginning to wonder about his effort, his direction—his destiny even, maybe. One day he goes home, but he doesn't. He comes here. He drinks to cheer up. He cheers down. Events swing him by the arms. We'll ask the bartender in that bar tomorrow. Not that whatever he'll say will matter much maybe."

"Edmond," the first paramedic said. "Fats Edmond, but don't call

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him Fats or he'll beat you up. We took subjects from there that were beaten badly."

"What will Fats say that won't matter much maybe?" De Gier asked.

Adjutant Grijpstra shrugged. "That the subject got drunk maybe, met a woman maybe, it didn't work out maybe. That he drank more maybe, he was a sporty type once maybe, he was going to show himself he was still a sporty type maybe?"

"That *aayuuuuh* the woman heard could be Tarzan's goodbye cry maybe," the paramedic said. "I wanted to be Tarzan, too. I still do maybe."

"Don't drink," Grijpstra told him. "The vine you're swinging from may break."

"I only drink beer," the paramedic said.

"What brand?" De Gier asked.

The paramedic smiled knowledgeably. "All beer is good beer."

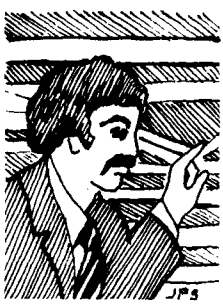
"So?" De Gier asked Grijpstra.

"So," Grijpstra said, "Mr. Frank Nullish, married to the bland blonde he keeps in his wallet, got himself into a situation that reminded him he once was Tarzan, swinging happily from a vine in the Amsterdam jungle. He does that again, Sergeant. Watch this." Grijpstra reached up into an empty and uncaring sky, lifted a huge leg. "Hup *one.*"

The first paramedic nodded at his partner. They each grabbed their end of the stretcher.

Grijpstra reached higher into the empty and uncaring sky and lifted a huge leg higher. "Hup *two.*"

The paramedics lifted the stretcher. There was a moment of reverend silence, then the stretcher slid into the ambulance while adjutant, sergeant, paramedic one and paramedic two sadly shouted: "Hup *three.*"



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A reprint from the much missed Jack Ritchie . . .

IN THE PUBLIC EYE

by JACK RITCHIE

I peered into the nest again. Two eggs. I had no idea when they would hatch, of course. One cannot determine such an event simply by a quick glance or two.

The two rose-breasted grosbeaks sortied again from the neighboring tree, angrily protesting my intrusion. I closed my eyes for a moment, listening. Yes, quite a distinct pattern of sounds.

I lowered myself to the ground, snagging for a moment the strap of my binoculars, and then I brushed the bark chips and dust from my jacket and trousers.

At the foot of the tree, I became aware of heavy footsteps and labored breathing from just beyond the head-high bush at my elbow. In another moment, a bulky form appeared out of the early-morning mist.

It was a man carrying a large object draped over his right shoulder. I observed that his burden was clad in a topcoat, from the bottom of which hung trousered legs and shod feet.

The carrier halted and blinked. He seemed to mull over the situation for a moment and then he said, "He's much heavier than I thought he would be. Do you mind if I put him down?"

I cleared my throat. "By all means."

He lowered what was obviously a dead body to the damp grass and propped it up against the tree. I now saw that it was male and, from the stained condition of the area of his chest, that his death had been a violent one.

Then the burden-carrier straightened. He glanced about and I suspected he was considering the option of fleeing, but something restrained him.

He rubbed the side of his neck. "Do you know who I am?"

I nodded.

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He sighed. "That damn recognition factor again." He decided to test me. "And just who do you think I am?"

"You are Lieutenant Governor Lucius M. Lambert."

Lucius M. Lambert is not an obscure figure. And he is known not so much for what he is today as for what is expected of him tomorrow.

The Lamberts have been in the public eye for generations. They are a wealthy, close, and driven family that has done well, numbering governors, congressmen, senators and the like, in their line. For Lucius Lambert, the lieutenant governorship is merely baptism into the field of politics. The Lamberts confidently look forward to the day when his initials will appear as routinely in crossword puzzles as JFK and FDR.

Lambert spent a few more seconds in thought and then said, "I happened to be taking my usual morning stroll through the park when I came upon this stranger's body. It looks as though he was mugged, or something like that. I was just in the process of carrying him to someone in authority."

He stopped talking. That just wouldn't wash.

I was at rather a loss about what to do. Was Lambert armed? One could logically expect that, couldn't one? Would I be shot down if I attempted to flee or run for the police?

Lambert stared down at the body. "Oliver was a blackmailer. It was a simple case of taking a colleague to a local motel for a drink. The colleague happened to be female. I simply couldn't afford to be involved in any mess like that, and, besides, my wife would have found out. Unfortunately, Oliver happened to witness the event, recognized me, and then proceeded to blackmail." He shook his head. "Oliver got greedy. Why do blackmailers get so greedy?"

"I wouldn't know."

"It started out as five hundred dollars a month. Then he demanded a thousand. Then two thousand. I knew where it was heading. I wasn't born yesterday, you know."

"Certainly not."

"I met Oliver with the revolver in one pocket and two thousand dollars in the other. When he told me that the next payment would have to be three thousand, that was the last straw."

My throat was rather dry. "You shot Oliver here? In the park?"

"No. It happened at our usual meeting place. But I couldn't just leave his body there. It's two hundred yards from the house, but still on our grounds. So I carried him to my car and drove down here to the lakefront. I was going to deposit him somewhere along one of

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these lanes. When his body was found, it would naturally be assumed that he had been killed during an encounter with some hoodlum." Lambert studied me. "On my way down here I threw the gun into the river."

Ah, I thought, he no longer has the murder weapon.

Lambert smiled. "Actually, if I still had the revolver I would have shot you, too, without the slightest hesitation. After all, one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb." He chuckled. "Frankly, I have very little conscience. I never feel guilty about anything. I just don't like to get caught."

Clearly it was time for me to fetch the police.

Lambert guessed my intention and held up a hand. "Hold it. As you can see, you are in no physical danger from me now. You are larger than I am and I have no black belt in karate. So why not stay a few seconds more and listen?"

He snapped his fingers. "I almost forgot. I'd better take Oliver's wallet to make it all look more believable." He relieved the body of that item.

I was aghast. "You mean you still think you can get away with this?"

He smiled confidently. "Why not? You look to me like a man who could use two thousand dollars." He pulled a plump envelope from his coat pocket.

I blinked. "Do you seriously expect me to take two thousand dollars to cover up a murder? To turn my back on a gross felony?"

His voice was rather soothing. "But of course not. Not for a paltry two thousand dollars. This is merely the first payment. How does two thousand dollars every month strike you?"

Could I use two thousand dollars? And each month? No more reporting to that miserable office each morning? No more forty hours a week down the cosmic drain, not to mention the ten or more hours fighting the nerve-shattering traffic? Tahiti? The Marquesas? Bali?

No. I have devoted years and years to the birdlife of the upper Midwest and I feel that there is still much work to be done.

What would two thousand dollars really buy?

Time. That was it.

Time is living. And yet we are forced to sell time. We sell our lives for three dollars an hour, or five, or fifty.

Lambert pressed home. "I'll arrange that you get the money regularly. And I guarantee that you have absolutely nothing to worry about. Just as long as you don't get greedy, of course."

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He stared down at Oliver's body and then a new light seemed to come into his eyes. He clapped a hand to his forehead. "What a fool I've been. What proof do you have that I killed Oliver?"

"Proof? Well, your confession—"

He laughed. "Ha! I deny that I ever made it. Suppose you do go to the police? It would be your word against mine. The word of the lieutenant governor of this state against that of a bird-watcher. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you were labeled some kind of a nut trying to ruin my political career."

He stuffed the envelope back into his pocket. "As a matter of fact, the police just might decide that it was you who killed Oliver and in a panic came up with that ridiculous story trying to involve me. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes once they start questioning you."

He turned up the collar of his coat and prepared to leave. "I think the best thing for both of us is to turn our backs and go our separate ways. Let some early-morning jogger find Oliver's body."

After he disappeared into the mist, I waited for perhaps three minutes and then made my way back up the sloping trunk of the tree to the nest.

Yes, I am a bird-watcher, but more specifically I am a bird-listener. I listen to the sounds they make. I also collect them.

I retrieved my recording equipment and slid down the tree to the ground. I rewound the tape and then let it run from the beginning.

First, the relative silence, then a bit of my wheezing as I had lowered myself down the tree the first time, and then, after a few moments, Lambert's first words: "He's much heavier than I thought he would be. Do you mind if I put him down?"

Every word quite clear, right down to Lambert's final sentence.

It would be no trouble at all to make copies of the tape. I could send one of them to Lambert so he would know I had the proof of his involvement in Oliver's death.

And from the security of my anonymity, I could begin to blackmail him.

Would I get greedy, too?

I smiled. Twenty-four hours a day to myself? I could buy a recreational vehicle. I could travel. The Wisconsin Dells in the summer. The Horicon marsh in the fall. Sheboygan in the spring.

I pulled myself together. No. It simply wasn't meant to be. I couldn't allow a future in which a man like Lambert would occupy the White House and sit with his thumb poised over the final red button. No. I went off in search of a policeman.

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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

TERRY MULLINS

Walker turned to Conrad. "If you're an anthropologist, you should be interested in the ruins on the reservation."

"You mean the Navaho ruins around Shonto? I've seen them. They're very interesting."

"No. I mean the ruins outside of old Oraibi. No one knows much about them, but I've been all over there. I could show you around."

Conrad noticed that Sun Bear suddenly seemed to freeze up. His face was grave and he sent a hostile look at Walker . . .

PEOPLE OF PEACE

by TERRY MULLINS

Jake's was run by Jake Johnson, a Hopi Indian who had come to Holbrook when he was eighteen. He had married a widow eight years older than himself and had turned her struggling restaurant into a successful restaurant-bar. There was a large sign in the front window that read, "No alcohol sold to Indians." All around the sign were dusty bottles of rubbing alcohol. The display was part of a local joke. Jake's place attracted more Indians than any other restaurant in town. Navaho, Apache, Zuni, Pueblo, and Hopi, they came as families in station wagons and vans.

It was there that Conrad Micah met Sun Bear and Dusk Walker. He was eating at a table near the wall when two carloads of Indians poured in, greeting Jake with questions about Holbrook and telling him what was going on at the reservation. They filled the empty tables and two of the younger men had to join Conrad. One was about thirty years old and had dyed his hair a startling red, yet the man was reserved, almost solemn, in his manner. The other was

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perhaps five years older, with jet-black hair worn long and loose. He had fine white teeth and he smiled and laughed often. He introduced himself as Dusk Walker and his friend as Sun Bear. Conrad wondered if Sun Bear's reserve was natural or the result of not finding an opening. Walker talked nonstop, more than any Indian Conrad had ever met.

He said he had gone to high school in Flagstaff and had been a star baseball and football player. He told of his feats on the playing field and his efforts to organize a Hopi football team. His egotism was shameless and flamboyant. Even his stoic friend smiled more than once during the meal.

"In a game against Phoenix," Walker said, "they had an unbelievable outfielder. He played my position and was even better than me. He caught everything hit anywhere near him and robbed us of three home runs. We see that with him in the outfield, we won't get many runs. But before the game I'd seen a nest of snakes under the bleachers, so as I'm going out one inning I pick up three of the largest and take them with me—they've been in a cool shady place, so I know they're lazy.

"Well, I set them loose in the hot outfield and when this outfielder comes to replace me at the end of their inning, he sees the snakes and he's terrified. He can't run anywhere because he's afraid he'll step on one. He never caught another fly the whole game and we scored one run after another."

He stopped and looked at Conrad speculatively. "You don't look like a tourist," he said. "What are you doing in Holbrook?"

"I'm studying anthropology," Conrad told him. "Last year I was at New Mexico State but this semester I'm working out of Northern Arizona University. My field is cultural conflict."

"I thought you might be looking for gold. There's lots of it around here. Sun Bear here found some a couple of years ago up above Keams Canyon, but he won't tell anyone where he found it—he's afraid he'll start a gold rush."

Conrad looked at Sun Bear, who smiled and said, "Three grains of placer gold. He turns it into a mountainful."

"Then why won't you tell anyone where you found it?" Walker asked.

"*You* know where—above Keams Canyon."

Walker turned to Conrad. "If you're an anthropologist, you should be interested in the ruins on the reservation."

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"You mean the Navaho ruins around Shonto? I've seen them. They're very interesting."

"No, I mean the ruins outside of old Oraibi. No one knows much about them, but I've been all over there. I could show you around."

Conrad noticed that Sun Bear suddenly seemed to freeze up. His face was grave and he sent a hostile look at Walker.

"Thank you," Conrad said, "I'll keep it in mind."

That night he came back to Jake's and found it full of tourists who had spent the day exploring the Petrified Forest. Many of them, disappointed at not being permitted to take samples, were clustered around the curio shop run by Jake's wife. They were paying extravagant prices for pieces of petrified wood found outside the preserve. Sun Bear and Dusk Walker were starting on a pizza when Conrad arrived and Walker waved for him to join them. He did and was entertained by Walker until the pizza was gone—then Walker went over to the tourists and took out a small bag which he told them contained petrified wood from outside Jasper.

"Won't he get into trouble?" Conrad asked.

Sun Bear laughed. "No. It isn't even petrified wood, just some pretty rocks with bright colors. After the tourists see Jasper and the Rainbow Forest Museum, they aren't satisfied with dull pieces of petrified wood, so they're eager to believe whatever Walker tells them."

Walker soon sold all the rocks in his pouch and came back to join them. "See that college student I just talked to?" he said. "He thinks he knows all about the Hopi. He spent yesterday walking over the Betatakin and Keet Seel ruins. He told me they were the only authentic Hopi monuments in the area. He should talk with Chief Chiya about that."

Sun Bear said, "Maybe you should introduce them. Chief Chiya is at that table over there."

Walker laughed. "No. He might show the Chief the rocks I sold him as petrified wood."

Conrad looked at the small old man Sun Bear had indicated. There was an air of dignity and simplicity about him. His long grey hair was thinning and his face was deeply wrinkled, but there was an air of authority about him which he exercised in perfect stillness.

Walker saw Conrad's interest and said, "I could introduce *you*, though. I haven't sold you anything."

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Conrad was reluctant to intrude on Chief Chiya but Walker insisted.

The old man acknowledged the introduction gravely. Walker said, "Conrad here is an anthropologist. Tell him why you don't think the Betatakin ruins are the best Hopi monuments." It was a crude and impertinent thing to say, almost as if he were talking to a child, but the Chief ignored the rudeness.

"You have seen them?" he asked Conrad.

"Yes, set under the ledge of a mountain."

"That is what is wrong."

"Why?"

The old Chief's face was relaxed, his eyes closed as he replied, "The Hopi sees to the horizon. He sees the clouds as they form and as they move across the sky. He sees lightning dance from cloud to cloud and fall in broken streaks to the ground. The Hopi does not shut himself off from the horizon."

It was two days later when Conrad met Johnny and Sara Hawk at a Friends' meeting. Conrad had been meeting with some Quakers in Holbrook on occasional Wednesdays. This time a similar group joined them at the Hopi reservation. Johnny and Sara were Friends, and so—to Conrad's surprise—was Sun Bear. Johnny Hawk was about seventeen and Sara perhaps two years younger, two typical American teenagers. They were standing by Sun Bear when Conrad asked him, "Where's Walker?" Johnny looked up in dismay and Sara gasped.

Sun Bear said, "Walker is not a Christian." He was about to say more when Sara said, "Please do not talk about him." Conrad apologized and Sun Bear said, "You could not know."

After the meeting, Sun Bear said, "There is something you should know about Walker. I would like for the head of my clan to tell you."

He led Conrad to a house in the center of town. Inside, he introduced him to an old man with thin arms and legs covered loosely with skin that looked like leather. He had black eyes as impenetrable as obsidian. Sun Bear said, "Antelope in the Wind, this is Conrad Micah. He should know about Walker."

The old man looked at Conrad and asked, "You know Walker?"

"Yes, I've met him. With Sun Bear."

Antelope in the Wind spoke without passion, as one reciting bare facts, "Dusk Walker was chosen to be Mastop at our Soyal ceremony.

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He brought evil on our crops—on all tribal life." He signed to Sun Bear to continue.

Sun Bear explained. "Mastop comes from beyond the stars and brings life to earth. He enters the village, seizes one of the married women, and simulates copulation with her. This assures fertility and prosperity for the year. But Mastop seized Sara Hawk instead of one of the married women. She is Dusk Walker's cousin—he knew better. It was an evil act."

Conrad could imagine the psychological trauma the young girl must have felt, the shame and revulsion, but he sensed a mystical abhorrence in the two men that they were unable to convey to him—something more and something darker.

"From what you say," he said, "Walker didn't actually hurt Sara."

"It was spiritual rape. It was also a polluting of the ritual. Mastop must choose only a married woman for the drama of copulation. In choosing a maiden, he defiled the drama."

Conrad looked to Antelope in the Wind. The old Hopi took a prayer stick and broke it. He threw it in the fire. "That was my prayer stick which Mastop blessed," he said.

The following Saturday, Johnny and Sara Hawk were members of a party of Indians that came into Holbrook to be part of a local Friends' demonstration against testing nuclear weapons. Though it had a serious purpose, the rally also had the overtones of a picnic.

Conrad joined the group as they were marching through Holbrook. After they had reached the Navaho County Courthouse and had been photographed waving their placards, they sang "Down by the Riverside," and dispersed. It wasn't yet one o'clock, and most of the Indians headed for Jake's place.

Conrad found himself walking with Johnny and Sara.

There had been growing within him a wonder at the almost casual blending of values, Hopi and Christian, he had found in Sun Bear, Johnny, and Sara, and he realized that as an anthropologist—and, he liked to think, as something of a scientist—he tended to isolate ideas and tried to keep them sterile, uncontaminated. These people didn't do that. They didn't want to discard their peculiar ideas and values, they didn't want to dissolve into the American sea of custom, but neither did they want to be living museum pieces. Conrad found that the Hopi who attended meeting were more Quaker than he was. In some ways, they were more modern than he was—while he

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was studying artifacts of their past, they were acting to change his future.

He felt a need to talk about it. "You take part in the Hopi rituals, don't you?" he asked Johnny.

"Yes, of course."

"How can you be Quakers and take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies?"

Johnny looked surprised and said, "They're part of our cultural heritage. We don't consider them non-Christian. The Hopi are people of peace. The Friends are also people of peace."

Conrad thought it over and found himself puzzled by, and perhaps envious of, the ability of these people to give themselves deeply to such a wide range of commitments. Their affirmations seemed to be growing, while he suspected his were shrinking.

"What are your plans for the afternoon?" he asked.

"We'll return to Walpi and begin gathering material for making prayer sticks. November is the month of the Hawk Moon. You'll see standards fixed on different kivas. We're getting ready for the New Fire ceremony."

Conrad watched as they joined a company of Hopi and drove back to the reservation.

He was surprised later to see that Walker was still in town. He was leaning against a beat-up but powerful motorcycle. Extolling its merits to Conrad in a loud voice, he said, "I can ride anything with wheels or four legs. There's a lot of mileage on this, but it can still beat any bike in town."

A teenager with a new motorcycle nearby challenged his boast and before long someone suggested a race. A crowd collected and gathered enough money for a prize of fifty dollars for the winner.

The two agreed to race from the edge of Holbrook to Winslow and back. As they pushed their motorcycles to the starting point, the crowd grew and started betting, most of the tourists betting on the kid and locals staking heavily on Walker. Then the race got off with shouts and whoops and the contestants disappeared down Route 40, into the sunset.

The crowd milled around, waiting for the racers to return. They ate snacks and drank cold drinks at the Texaco station. Conrad spotted Sun Bear in the crowd and asked him who he thought would win.

"Walker, of course. He always does. Every four or five months

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they stage this sort of thing. The two of them drive well out of sight and park until the right amount of time passes. Then they head back into town. Walker will be just a little bit ahead of the kid all the way. They'll split the prize money and collect part of the bets the locals win from the tourists."

The race ended as Sun Bear said it would. For a while it looked as if the kid would overtake Walker but he never quite did. Conrad had to admit it was exciting. Those who lost money betting on the kid said they'd back him again in another race. They tried to arrange one for the next day, but the contestants had sense enough to refuse.

Conrad laughed. "Walker is a character."

"Don't let him fool you," Sun Bear said. "He's not just a good-natured rogue. There's real meanness there."

"I know what you and Antelope in the Wind told me. I hate to think of Sara being humiliated that way, but maybe he just got carried away. He obviously doesn't have much self-restraint."

"There's more," said Sun Bear. "Could you drive into Walpi again?"

"Sure. But why?"

"Antelope in the Wind heard that Walker is cultivating your company. He thinks you should be told everything about Walker."

They arrived at Walpi as the gatherers were bringing in material for prayer sticks. In the house of Antelope in the Wind, the old man was pleased to see them. They sat and he began.

"It is dangerous to trust Dusk Walker. He is a man who wears many masks. He was not always the brash person you have seen. When he was a youth, he was fearful and overly submissive. Then, almost between sunrises, he changed.

"At first he was just loud and aggressive. To that he soon added foolish talk and asking questions he had no right to ask. He mocked the work and the words of others. When he saw that this was making people dislike him and shun him, he assumed a forced cheerfulness, masking his brutality as a joke.

"We older men suspected that he had become a sorcerer. We waited four years to see if he would give away part of his wealth—that is the way lower-grade sorcerers make up for their evil: every four years they give away something. But he did not. Instead, a more dreadful thing happened. His crippled niece was found in a gully, raped and strangled. No one suspected Walker except three of us old ones. We knew that the most evil sorcerers pay for life by killing

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their relations. The death of a female gives them four more years of life."

Antelope in the Wind was silent. Conrad tried to fit this picture of Walker with the genial, talkative man he knew. He couldn't accept it. "What did you do about it?" he asked.

"We three had respect but no power. Walker spent much time comforting the girl's family. He led a movement among the young men to bring in the white authorities. They did so, and the state police tried to find a man who had driven through the reservation and quarreled over the price of some trinkets he'd bought. He was unshaven and had been drinking. He drove a car with a California license plate. They never found him. Then four years later another girl related to Walker was murdered off the reservation, in Flagstaff. That was four years ago. The sorcerer must kill again to give himself another four years of life."

Conrad turned to Sun Bear. "Did you know this?"

Sun Bear nodded silently.

Antelope in the Wind said, "Sun Bear is one of the few young men who listened to us from the first. For a long time he could not believe that Walker was evil. Now he does. He stays close to Walker to keep watch on him. He could not prevent the second murder but he will prevent the third."

"Do you think what he did as Mastop indicates he's chosen Sara as his victim?"

"Yes," Sun Bear replied. "I think she is to be next."

It was with conflicting emotions that Conrad joined Sun Bear and Walker in the cafe the next day. As usual, Walker took charge of the conversation, telling how he had chased a small Navaho hunting party off disputed Hopi land. Conrad, knowing that the Navaho were warriors and the Hopi were people of peace, expressed surprise.

Walker said, "You can ask Sun Bear. He was there."

"So were six other Hopi," Sun Bear said. "We, too, were hunting. There was no conflict. It's easy for a hunting party to blunder beyond its own territory. We all do it."

"But I chased them off Hopi land."

"They went. They do not want Hopi on Navaho land and they did not want to be on ours."

Walker left it at that and proceeded to tell of finding a litter of coyote pups and selling them to tourists.

There was no doubt about Walker's salesmanship. Conrad had

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seen him bring in a vanload of pottery and sell it for several times the amount the Indians in Hoteville charged for it. Tourists were delighted by this loquacious Hopi and his aggressive and flattering manner. As a result, he was wealthy by Hopi standards—even by Conrad's standards. Still, Conrad couldn't help noticing that he had no real friends among the Hopi. Only Sun Bear was a close companion and Conrad now knew that this was for reasons other than friendship. Conrad wondered if Walker might simply have stirred up envy among the other Indians who lacked his gift with tourists. There was no real evidence that he was a killer.

It was largely by chance that Conrad joined Johnny and Sara Hawk when they went to Oraibi. He asked them how preparations for the New Fire ceremony were going. They said that their clan's preparations were going well but that there were other serious problems. "Someone stole the *tiponi* from the leader of the Two Horn Society's house," Johnny said.

"What kind of *tiponi* is it?"

"It is a little wooden figure. It must be on the altar during parts of the ceremony. It is very old. It used to stand on the Two Horn altar in old Oraibi. Someone said it might have gone back there. Sara and I are going there to look for it."

"Could I go with you? I'll drive if you need a lift."

They agreed. Conrad was pleased. He had wanted to see the deserted kivas that Walker had talked about and he preferred going with Johnny and Sara.

They drove to Oraibi that afternoon, parked the car, and hiked into the rough country outside the village until they came to a place where a number of small mounds seemed to rise out of the ground. Johnny led the way to one in the center. He threw back bushes that were covering it and revealed a hole opening into a dark subterranean room. There was a crude ladder leading down into a pit.

"I will go first," Johnny said, "then Sara, then you."

He tested the ladder and found it sound. A moment after he descended they heard him call, "Okay!" Sara followed. Just then Conrad had an eerie feeling that they were being watched. It was a wild place. Standing on the kiva, he could see for miles and he saw no living thing, human, animal, or bird, in any direction. The sky was as barren as the earth.

"Okay!" Johnny's voice sounded again from the room below. Conrad started down. When he reached the bottom, it took his eyes a

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while to adjust. The dark room was rectangular—and not empty as he had expected it to be. All around, there were strange shapes. A fire pit held charred pieces of wood. Prayer sticks stood at the rear of an altar, a wooden figure about a foot high in front of them. On the floor of the kiva were bowls and a clay water jug.

Johnny started toward the altar. "That is the stolen *tiponi*," he said.

Suddenly the kiva was darkened. They looked up and saw a huge figure blocking the opening. It started down the ladder toward them. The figure was painted black and wore a black hooded mask. White handprints stood out starkly on the black of his body. His feet were covered in fur. There were three white stars on the left side of his face and a collar of grass around his neck. He carried a black rod with white rings painted on it. Sara screamed and crumpled to the floor. Conrad shied involuntarily and looked around for a weapon. Johnny took two steps toward the figure and asked, "Who are you?"

The masked figure said nothing but drew a long hunting knife as he continued down the ladder. There was no mistaking his deadly intent. Conrad moved to his right and waved Johnny to his left. They had little hope against the powerful figure with the wicked knife, but if one of them could take him from behind they might have a chance.

Two rungs from the bottom, the menacing figure straightened up, gave a cry, and pitched head-foremost to the floor, his extended wand almost touching Sara. His knife fell at Johnny's feet. An arrow was driven deep into his back.

At first the two men couldn't move. They had been braced to die fighting. Then Conrad walked to the fallen figure and removed his mask. "It's Walker!" he said. "I think he's dead."

Conrad and Johnny carried Sara up the ladder and into the open. The fresh air revived her, but she remained almost hysterical for several minutes. As before, there was no sign of anyone anywhere.

When Conrad suggested going for the sheriff, Johnny said they had to report the killing to Chief Chiya. A Hopi had been killed on Hopi land. It was not the white man's affair. Conrad handed his car keys to Johnny. "You and Sara go to the Chief," he said. "I'll stay with Walker until you return."

"No, Chief Chiya will want your story, too," Johnny said. He went back down into the kiva to get the *tiponi* and they all drove back to Walpi.

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Chief Chiya listened to all they said, then told Johnny to take Sara home and stay with her. He told Conrad to call the sheriff and take him to the kiva. "It was Sun Bear's arrow that killed Walker to save your lives," he told them. "He will have gone to the old altar beyond the kiva where Walker died. Look for him there. He will be seeking control of the material aspects of his deed. He will try to understand and transcend them."

Conrad was sitting by the telephone when the sheriff's car drove up. It had been twenty minutes. Walpi was quiet. Conrad had the feeling that all that happened was known, but no one walked the streets.

The sheriff's deputy got out of the front seat and into the back to let Conrad sit beside the sheriff. Long shadows were beginning to darken the land and the day was beginning to feel the first touch of chill. The sheriff sent the car speeding down the straight road to Oraibi.

They saw living things only twice on their drive. At one place they scared three rabbits who were sitting in the middle of the road. Later they disturbed a vulture eating the remains of a coyote that had been killed by a car. Conrad considered both of these to be ill omens.

At Oraibi, Conrad directed the sheriff to the silent kiva beyond the old village. The sheriff and his deputy followed him down the ladder to where Walker lay. The body was as they'd left it. Conrad described what had happened.

"If it was Sun Bear who killed him, he's a hero," the sheriff said. "Walker would have killed all three of you."

"I don't think Sun Bear wants to be a hero," Conrad said. "He is a Hopi, of the people of peace."

They carried Walker to the car. Then Conrad led the sheriff to where Chief Chiya had said they would find Sun Bear.

There was a crumbled wall with a wooden gate fallen aside and decaying. As they approached, a young girl came through the gate. Her chin and throat were painted white, as was the upper part of her forehead. Her face was painted black. She wore a black dress covered with a red-and-white tunic. An eagle feather in her hair and a turquoise necklace were her only ornaments. She carried a clay jar like one Conrad had seen in the kiva. She did not speak, but walked past them as one in a trance.

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They went in. It was a part of the ruins none of them had ever seen. The roof had long been destroyed. What was left was a large room with an altar. On the altar were a dozen prayer sticks and two wooden figures. Before the altar, face up, lay Sun Bear. He was painted grey except for his chin and lightning designs on his chest, arms, and legs. In his right hand he held a rattlesnake, alive and writhing but unable to escape from the death grip of the Hopi.

Conrad stood still. The sheriff shot the rattlesnake and bent over Sun Bear. He shook his head and examined Sun Bear's right arm. "Is he dead?" Conrad asked.

"Yes. The rattler must have bitten him four or five times. Strange—I've seen them hold rattlers, even pick them up with their mouths, and never get bitten."

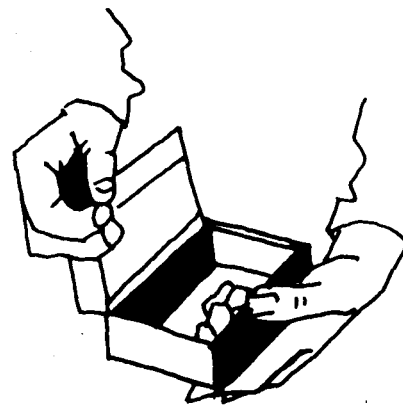
"That was with the whole tribe taking part in a ritual, wasn't it?"

"Yes. And they sometimes *are* bitten—it's always dangerous. But they seldom die from it."

Conrad thought a while. "The snake symbolizes the evil side of human nature. It lives in dark holes in the earth and comes out to feed. I think this was a struggle between Sun Bear and the evil side of himself. He didn't win. But the snake didn't escape, either—to go back into its foul hole and breed."

"But why did he want to kill himself? You and Johnny and Sara could testify that he killed Walker to save your lives. Any jury would have set him free."

"He didn't commit suicide," Conrad explained. "He paid his debt to his culture."



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A *NEW* short story by

MALCOLM GRAY

Craig had heard of the Balnay. It was a semi-official institution that carried out research and tested products for government departments as well as private companies. "Why were you sacked?" he asked Alison.

"It's outrageous," her father declared, glaring at Craig as if he were responsible. "They said she'd leaked a confidential report to the press . . ."

THE BALNAY REPORT

by MALCOLM GRAY

The sign on the door read ALAN CRAIG ASSOCIATES. There were no associates. No anything, except Craig, a few pieces of second- or third-hand furniture, and an overdraft pushing its limit. Georgie put Craig's coffee cup down on his desk and regarded him with a challenging expression. "Well?" she demanded.

"Well what?" Craig asked.

Georgie, who was twenty, slim, and very pretty, shook her head so that her hair swung in a thick, glossy curtain. In the comparatively short time he had known her, Craig had seen it change from its natural dark-brown to short red-brown curls, a multi-colored punk, and silver-blonde. This morning it was a rich, golden tawny.

"Aren't you going to say 'ow 'orrible it is? You usually do." Her tone was half defiant, half defensive. Craig's opinion counted for more with her than she was prepared to let him see.

"It's all right," he said. Personally he had rather enjoyed her silver-blonde phase. It had brightened the office, which, heaven knew, needed brightening.

"Thanks, I must say!"

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Georgie went out with a defiant wiggle, leaving Craig to sip his coffee and wonder again how long it would be before Les, his landlord, realized that he was supplying him with free coffee and tea and that his telephonist also acted as Craig's unpaid receptionist.

A moment later Georgie put her head round the door again. "There's a man and a girl to see you," she announced. "You'd better be careful, 'e looks like 'e wants a fight. What 'ave you bin up to?"

"Nothing," Craig said indignantly. He handed Georgie his empty cup and walked through to his outer office. One of these days maybe he'd be able to afford a secretary to occupy it, but that looked like being a long time away.

The man and girl were standing in the middle of the room, looking respectively impatient and nervous. The man was middle-aged, stocky, and balding, with pudgy cheeks, a brick-red complexion, and a small sandy moustache. Georgie had been right, Craig thought, he did look as if he was spoiling for a fight. The girl was about twenty, and fair in a washed-out way. Craig wondered if the man was her father. If so, he could understand why she looked nervous.

"I'm Gerald Battle," the man said. "Battle Products." The name suited him, but if he expected it would mean anything to Craig he was disappointed.

"I'm Alan Craig. Will you come through?"

Battle led the way, followed by the girl. Craig thought she looked as if she'd rather have stayed where she was. "What can I do you for?" he asked.

"This is my daughter Alison. She's been sacked." Battle's tone held no pride or affection, only an outraged sense of possession. As if she were his car and somebody had driven into her.

Craig looked at the girl. She was staring at her hands in her lap, twisting and intertwining her fingers. He suspected she had been dragged here against her will. She was plain, neatly but rather dowdily dressed, and looked pleasant and reasonably intelligent. Not necessarily honest.

"We'd better start at the beginning," he said. "Who did you work for?"

He had spoken to Alison, but her father answered. "The Balnay Institute. She was a research assistant there."

Craig had heard of the Balnay. It was a semi-official institution that carried out research and tested products for government departments as well as private companies. "Why were you sacked?" he asked Alison.

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"It's outrageous," Battle declared, glaring at Craig as if he were responsible. "They said she'd leaked a confidential report to the press."

"Had you?" Craig asked her.

The girl shook her head.

"What the hell do you mean?" Battle demanded angrily. "No daughter of mine—"

"I wanted to hear her say herself she hadn't," Craig told him.

"I hadn't," Alison said in a nervous whisper.

"So why did they sack you?"

"There were four of us. They didn't know who'd done it, so they dismissed us all."

"It's an outrage!" Battle exclaimed.

"It seems to me you should consult a solicitor," Craig told him. "You probably have grounds for going to an industrial tribunal and claiming unfair dismissal."

"And where would that get us?" Battle demanded. "I went to my solicitors, Smith Drayton, in High Holborn. McIver suggested I come to you. According to him, it would take months to get the case heard, and then it would be Alison's word against Farmer's."

"Farmer's?"

"Dr. Farmer. He's the head of the department," Alison said.

"It was him sacked her," Battle explained. "If I had my way—"

"It wasn't like him," Alison went on in a wondering tone. "He always seemed nice. I liked working there."

"What happened?" Craig asked.

"Our section had been testing a new product Mantons are bringing out. It's a different sort of plant food, and we were carrying out trials to see if it could have any harmful effects or anything like that."

"Surely a firm Mantons' size has its own labs?" Craig said.

"I think they wanted an independent opinion. There's been a lot of talk about the safety of fertilizers and pesticides and that, and they probably wanted to be able to say the Institute had passed it." Talking about her work, Alison had grown in confidence.

"And did you?" Craig inquired.

"No. Well, not really. We found it made things grow, but it could have harmful effects on animals fed on plants treated with it over a long period. Peter Timothy—he was the leader of our team—wrote a report, and somebody leaked it to the *Globe*."

The *Globe* was one of the most sensational, widely read tabloids in the country.

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"Who were in the team?" Craig asked.

"Peter, Joan York, Clive Drake, and me."

The way Alison hesitated before saying Drake's name persuaded Craig that there was something between them. "And Dr. Farmer?" he said.

"The department's split into five teams. He didn't have anything to do with our work."

"So what happened?"

"He called us into his office and told us about the leak and that Mantons was furious. They'd spent ever so much on developing and advertising the product and now they'd get an awful lot of bad publicity. They'd threatened to sue the Institute. It must have been one of the four of us who took the report to the *Globe*—nobody else had seen it apart from him and the professor. That's Professor Harper, he's the head of the whole Institute. He said he'd give whoever it was two days to own up. Well, nobody did, and he called us in again and told us the professor had said we must all go."

"Like a damned schoolmaster," Battle declared bitterly. "You can't treat adults like that and get away with it."

For once Craig was inclined to agree with him, although he suspected that had something similar occurred in Battle's own firm, he would have done the same. And the Institute's head had been put in a difficult position, with its integrity at stake and a big company threatening action. Most places would have brought in a firm of agents to carry out an internal inquiry, but perhaps that wouldn't have placated Mantons.

"They've given us good references," Alison said diffidently. "I'm sure I'll be able to get another job. I'd rather not go on with this." She looked pleadingly at her father.

"It's not a case of what you'd rather do," he told her forcefully. "You're under suspicion for something you didn't do and you've got to clear your name."

Alison didn't look as if that was the first thing on her mind.

"How well do you know Clive Drake?" Craig asked her.

She blushed. "We worked together."

"And?"

"What are you getting at?" Battle demanded.

Craig ignored him. "Away from work?" he asked.

"We've been out together once or twice."

"Once or twice?" Craig suspected she knew exactly how many times.

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"Twice," she muttered.

"You didn't tell me," her father complained angrily.

"Why should I?" Alison asked with a flicker of independence.

"You think it was him took the report to the *Globe,* don't you?" Craig asked quietly. "That's why you didn't want to come here. You'd rather the whole matter was left to die a natural death."

"No!" But it was clear she did.

"Tell me about the others."

"Well—" Again the girl hesitated. But this time Craig thought it was to gather her thoughts together—she was too young and too naive to be reluctant to talk about her colleagues. "Peter always seemed worried and said he was hard up. He's married and they have four children. I like him. He's quite old and he'd been at the Institute for ages, but he treated me as if I mattered. I don't think he was really good at his job, though."

Craig glanced at the notes he'd made. It was no use asking her about Drake. "That leaves Joan York," he said.

"She's older than Peter. She's really clever and everybody thought she'd be made the team leader when Mr. Harrison left, but Peter was."

A woman scorned, Craig thought. It used to mean in love. These days, perhaps, it applied equally to one passed over at work in favor of a less able man. Or a man she perceived to be less able. It probably wasn't true, anyway.

The team had finished its work three weeks ago. They had discussed their findings, then Timothy had typed his report, using the machine in the section's office. They had all seen him doing it. He had finished it late on a Friday afternoon and put it in a drawer of the filing cabinet. Alison didn't know how many copies he had made, nor what had happened to them subsequently.

Craig took her through her story again. Then, "Well," Battle demanded, "what are you going to do?"

"I'll make some inquiries," Craig answered. He had liked the way Alison talked, but her father's manner was getting under his skin.

"What's it going to cost me?"

"Twenty pounds an hour plus expenses."

Battle's expression said clearly, "For this dump?" but he kept his thoughts to himself. "All right," he agreed. "But I'll expect results. I don't want you dragging it out to twist me for another hundred quid."

Craig ignored him. "I'll need some addresses," he told Alison.

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When she and her father had gone, Craig made two phone calls. From the first one he learned that the Balnay Institute had a high reputation and its integrity had never been questioned. The second was to make an appointment to see Miss York.

Joan York lived in a small flat in Ealing. When Craig rang the bell just before six that evening, she was in the kitchen preparing her evening meal. Her life might have collapsed around her, but she wasn't going to let it affect her more than she could help. Not yet, anyway. Time enough for that if she still hadn't found a job after two or three months. Joan couldn't imagine herself not working.

She was younger than Alison's description had led Craig to expect. About forty, he guessed. Her hair was naturally fair and she wore it in a short, no-nonsense style that suited her.

"Yes?" she asked, her clear grey eyes assessing Craig frankly.

He handed her one of his business cards and explained that he had been engaged to make some inquiries into the leak at the Balnay Institute.

"By Alison's father, I suppose."

"What makes you say that?" Craig asked, surprised.

"He phoned and demanded to know if I'd leaked the report. I told him that if he suggested I had to anyone else I'd instruct my solicitors to sue him for slander and put down the phone." Joan stepped back a pace. "You'd better come in."

The room into which she took him was like its owner, practical and unfussy. Craig reckoned she would have no patience with beating about the bush and he came straight to the point. "Were you surprised when Dr. Farmer sacked you all?" he asked.

Joan gave a rueful little smile. "Surprised? That's putting it mildly. I was stunned. I'd been there twelve years. And it wasn't like Roy Farmer to be so unjust—I think Professor Harper made him do it."

"Who do you think took the file?" Craig asked.

Joan sat down on an easy chair, gestured him to sit on another, and faced him squarely. "I haven't thought about it," she said.

"I find that hard to believe," Craig told her, meeting her eye.

For a moment Joan didn't say anything, then she conceded, "All right, of course I've thought about it. I try not to, but I can't help it. Who could? Whoever it was has lost me my job, after all. But what I think isn't evidence, so I don't propose to tell you." She paused.

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"If it makes it easier for you, I'll tell you one thing: it wasn't me and I'm sure it wasn't Alison."

"Oh?" Craig said.

"She hasn't enough personality."

It wasn't the explanation Craig had expected, but he was beginning to understand that Joan York wasn't a woman who always did or said what was expected of her. "Personality?" he repeated.

"It took nerve and determination to copy the report and take it to the *Globe*. Alison wouldn't have known where to start."

Craig thought she was probably right. And if Battle had had any doubts about his daughter, he would hardly have wanted anyone investigating the leak. It had taken someone like the woman sitting opposite him regarding him now with a quizzical expression.

"Someone like me," she said. "That's what you're thinking, isn't it?"

"Yes," Craig admitted.

"Only I don't possess the other qualities it needed."

"What are they?"

"Ruthlessness and complete selfishness. If I'd done what he did, I don't think I could live with myself." Joan's voice was bitter with contempt.

"Who does possess them?" Craig asked.

Joan hesitated. Then she said, "Clive Drake thinks he can do what he likes and spends much more than he can afford. He's one of the new amoral young—he has an inflated opinion of his own importance and no principles at all."

"You think he did it?"

"I've no idea. I daresay he'd be capable of it—and if he did, he certainly wouldn't own up, whatever it meant for other people."

"Would you?" Craig asked.

Joan looked surprised, and for a moment she didn't answer. Then she said thoughtfully, "I don't know. I'd like to think I would if other people were under suspicion and would lose their jobs, but—no, when it came down to it, I don't know."

"What about Peter Timothy?"

A cloud passed over Joan's expressive features. "He's far too honest," she said abruptly.

But she wasn't sure, Craig thought. She was desperately afraid that it was Timothy who had leaked the report. Yet, according to Alison, she should by rights have gotten his job. Was she in love with him? Also according to Alison, Timothy was always talking

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about being hard up. Scientists were often poorly paid, and he had a wife and four children to support.

"How many copies of the report did he type?" Craig asked.

"Three. One for the client, one for central filing, and one for the department. That was standard practice. Peter took the first two to Farmer and put our copy in the cabinet in our office."

"And that was the one that was copied."

"Yes. There were the usual identifying marks on each one."

So whoever had copied it had known the leak would be traced to the section and taken the risk of being discovered. That seemed like arrogance—or desperation.

"Could Timothy have typed a fourth copy?" Craig inquired.

Joan stared at him. "No," she replied. "I was with him when he took them out of the typewriter. There were three."

"The cabinet was locked?" She nodded. "And the report was copied sometime before Tuesday morning when the *Globe* rang Mantons to ask if they had any comment. Who had keys to the cabinet?"

This time the hesitation before Joan answered was longer than ever. "Peter," she said very quietly. "But I don't believe he did it. He's too honest, too responsible. His work meant too much to him for him to do a thing like that." Her manner was no longer so cool and controlled.

"If he was desperate for money—" Craig suggested.

Joan said nothing.

Clive Drake shared a flat in West Hampstead with another young man and a girl. When Craig drove up, a black Lotus Europa was parked by the curb outside the front door. He remembered what Joan York had said about Drake living beyond his means and wondered if the car were his. It was several years old, but it must cost a small fortune to run and insure.

Drake had dark chubby features and calculating eyes. His manner was patronizing and self-satisfied, and Craig disliked him within the first fifteen seconds.

"I suppose that silly little cow Alison has been bleating," Drake said indifferently.

"What makes you think that?"

"Come on. It would hardly be old Uncle Tim or her ladyship."

"Why not?"

"Well, he wouldn't risk having you snooping around, and she either leaked the report herself or she's scared stiff he did."

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"Do you think she may have done it?"

Drake shrugged. "Don't ask me. She asked the Farmer's Boy how they'd found out. That was a pretty funny way to put it if she didn't."

"The favorite theory seems to be that you did," Craig said.

Drake grinned. "Really? That's quite a compliment."

Craig felt like hitting him. "Is that your car outside?" he asked.

"What about it?"

"You're lucky to be able to afford to run a car like that."

Drake smirked. "Women go for it, and I do rather well on the gees," he said. "Farmer's got a Jag, the bastard. They reckon he used to be a good scientist. He's just a bloody pen pusher."

"You're not worried about losing your job?"

"Why should I be? I was looking for something else anyway, and they'll have to give me a bloody good reference now. Better than they'd have given me before. Farmer couldn't stick me."

Craig wondered whether Drake, having made up his mind to leave the Institute anyway, had seen an opportunity to make some easy money before he went. "Who do you think leaked the report?" he asked.

The young man looked him straight in the eye. "It's obvious to anybody but a moron like old Farmer," he said. "Uncle Tim."

Craig wouldn't have trusted him an inch. All the same, it was beginning to look as if he was right. It would have taken considerable nerve to remove the report from the file with the other members of the team never far away, and Timothy was the only one who had a key. He could have come back when they weren't there.

"Did you have keys to the cabinet or the section?" he asked.

Drake grinned. "Would I tell you if I had?"

"Probably not," Craig agreed. "Any more than you'd own up to leaking the report to save the other three's jobs."

He drove down the quiet suburban road and headed for Wembley. It took him a few minutes to locate Timothy's address—when he did, it turned out to be a 1930s semi halfway along a road of almost identical houses. There were trees along the grass verges on each side. The paint at Number 33 needed renewing and the Datsun Sunny in the drive had seen better days, but the flower beds in the patch of garden were immaculate.

His ring was answered by a woman in her thirties who might have been attractive if she hadn't looked so faded and weary.

"Is Mr. Timothy at home?" Craig asked her.

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"Yes." She retreated as far as a door on the left which was half open. "Peter, it's someone to see you."

A tallish, weedy man came into the hall. He had fair hair and glasses and stooped. "Hallo," he said.

"I'll see to the children," the woman told him. She went into the room he had just left.

Craig explained why he had come.

"I see," Timothy said. He didn't seem surprised. Perhaps he was resigned to the truth coming out, Craig thought. Or, more likely, Joan York had called to warn him.

"Is there somewhere we can talk?" he asked.

He had expected the biologist to take him into another room, but he led him through the house and out into the back garden. Craig wondered if it was to prevent their being overheard by his wife and children or because Timothy felt more comfortable there. It was nearly dark and a damp haze hung over everything. Craig was conscious of the chill, but his companion seemed oblivious of it.

Craig questioned him about his typing the report and putting it away in the filing cabinet. "What did you do with the top two copies?" he asked.

"I took them to Dr. Farmer on Monday morning."

"The cabinet was always locked?"

"Not always during the day. It was at night and over the weekend."

"Who had keys to it?"

There was a barely noticeable hesitation before Timothy answered, "I did."

"No one else?"

"No."

"Did any of the others borrow your key at any time after you'd put the report in the cabinet?"

"No, I'm sure they didn't."

"And no one went to the files while they were open?"

"No."

"You realize what you're saying, don't you, Mr. Timothy?" The scientist nodded miserably. "Did you take the report to the *Globe?*"

"No."

"So someone must have taken it during the day when the cabinet was unlocked."

"I suppose so."

"Can you suggest who? Could it have been Miss York?"

"No!"

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"Why not? I'd say she has the nerve."

"Joan would never do a thing like that," Timothy said. He sounded put out by the suggestion. "She values her integrity. Besides, she doesn't need the money. She's a first-rate biologist, she'll get another job tomorrow. A better one."

Craig reflected that people were seduced by other motives besides money. Had he been wrong about Joan York and, far from being in love with Timothy, she had harbored resentment over not getting his job all this time, finally committing a crime of which he was bound to be suspected? She couldn't have known all four members of the team would be dismissed. Indeed, she had said such drastic action was unlike Dr. Farmer and she thought his hand had been forced by the Institute's head. Her insistence now that Timothy couldn't have done it might be due to belated remorse. She had struck Craig as a woman who was harboring conflicting emotions behind her down-to-earth facade. A troubled woman. He had put that down to a possible guilty love and fear that Timothy had leaked the report, but perhaps the explanation was too facile. Her insistence on his innocence might be a smokescreen. You tended not to suspect a person who insisted someone else couldn't be guilty.

"Alison Battle?" he suggested.

"No, never." The scientist dismissed the suggestion.

"That leaves Clive Drake. You think it was him?"

Timothy looked more unhappy than ever. "I don't know. All I know is that I didn't do it."

"Do any of you have keys to the building?"

"Only me."

"So none of the others could have got in during the weekend and copied the report?"

"I don't suppose so."

Craig waited for the other man to say something else, but he only stood looking depressed, so he said, "Thank you, Mr. Timothy."

Miserably, Timothy showed him round the side of the house.

Everything pointed to his being the culprit, Craig thought. So why didn't he believe it? Was it wishful thinking, because he had liked the man and disliked Clive Drake? Surely he'd been in the police long enough to rid himself of that sort of woolly sentiment.

He drove home to his flat in Belsize Park, made himself a scratch meal, and watched a football match on television. He had lost his wife Jean in a car crash three years ago, and since then his life had

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seemed to lack purpose. He had just drifted along. Now he was thirty-four, and it was time he did something about it.

"Four people," Craig said. "One, two, three, four."

"I can count that far," Georgie told him in a withering tone. Her hair swung across her face and she pushed it back.

Craig grinned. Her hair smelled good, he thought. "All right, there are four people. Number One's a woman, about forty—attractive, down-to-earth, probably in love with Number Two. She wants to believe Three did it, but she's afraid it was Two."

"I don't like numbers," Georgie complained. "I forget which is which."

"Try," Craig told her. "Two is the leader of the four, married, hard up, diffident, and not exactly brilliant at his job. Everything points to him. He typed the report and he's the only one who had keys to the office and the filing cabinet. He says he's sure Number One didn't take it. Number Three's about twenty-five—big-headed and sure of himself. He thinks he only has to look at a girl and she'll fall for him. He spends more than he can afford and he couldn't care less about anyone except himself. He says he thinks Two took it. Number Four's the girl you saw. She's naive, has a thing going for Three, and all the others say she can't have taken it. Who do you reckon did?"

"Don't ask me," Georgie replied. "You're supposed to be the detective."

"You're a great help," Craig told her bitterly. "What's all that stuff about women's intuition?"

"All right, I'd say it was the girl, Number Four."

"Why?"

"Because nobody else thinks it was," Georgie said triumphantly. "It's always the least likely person in books."

Craig stared at her. "I wonder," he said. "Georgie, you're a darling."

During his time in the Met, Craig had come across a number of newspapermen. One of them was Geoffrey Hill, a reporter on the *Globe*. Later that morning he rang him. They chatted for a few minutes and Hill agreed to meet him for a drink at midday.

The pub was in a new concrete block near the *Globe*'s glass-and-steel tower in Docklands. From its windows there was a wide view of the world's largest construction site.

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Hill was waiting. He was short and dark and resembled a sparrow with ambitions to be a hawk—he had the cocky, predatory air. "Long time no see," he remarked as they shook hands. "I'll have a scotch."

Craig bought it and half a bitter for himself. He usually stuck to halves at lunchtime in case he had to do any driving afterward.

"What's it all about, then?" Hill inquired.

"What do you know about the *Globe*'s buying a Balnay Institute report?" Craig asked him.

Hill drank half his whisky, put down the glass, and eyed his companion thoughtfully. "A little," he replied. "What do you?"

"A little more," Craig said.

"What's your interest in it?"

"Four people worked on that report. Because one of them leaked it, they've all been sacked."

Hill shrugged. "Hard luck. As my father used to drum into me, it's not a fair world."

"I've been hired to ask a few questions," Craig told him.

"Understandable, if a waste of money."

"You don't think I'll get anywhere?"

"Not if you hope I'll tell you who brought the story to us. We have to protect our sources."

"Like the K.G.B. They get theirs back to Russia, what do you do?"

"Pay well and keep our mouths shut."

Craig grinned. It was a cynical grin. The only reason the press guarded the identity of the people who brought stories to them was fear that if they didn't, their sources would dry up. Papers like the *Globe* depended on disloyalty.

"That report was stolen," he said. "And my client's angry. If he sues the Institute, the court may order your editor to name a name."

This time it was Hill who smiled, and his amusement was equally cynical. "It won't."

"I wouldn't count on it," Craig said. "Are you prepared to go to jail for contempt?"

Hill finished his drink and pushed his glass across the table. "I'll have another scotch while I think about it," he said.

"Not if you won't tell me anything."

"You get a letter of authority from our source and I'll give you a name." The journalist smiled innocently.

"And how do I get it if I don't know who he is?" Craig asked.

"That's your problem, mate. You know as well as I do no court

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would order us to name him. There's no public interest involved, just commercial."

"You're out of date—theft makes it of public interest," Craig said. In a level voice he asked, "Why do you reckon he did it?"

"Who said it was a man?"

"You did, just now. You said no court would order you to name him."

"Did I? All right, why do *you* think he did it? Money? Or maybe he had a grudge. Or he liked the feeling of power it gave him."

The last two didn't sound like Timothy, Craig thought. And now he could eliminate the two women—unless one of them had used a man to make the contact. He couldn't picture Joan York doing that.

Two down, two left.

After Hill had gone, Craig had another half with a beef sandwich, then drove out to the Balnay Institute at Brentford on the western outskirts of London.

Two modern red-brick buildings with steeply pitched tiled roofs stood well back from the road behind flower beds and shrubs. The only vacant space in the car park was labeled MR. TIMOTHY. Craig reckoned Timothy was unlikely to want to use it today, parked his ancient Dolomite Sprint, and walked across to the door marked ENQUIRIES. A dark-grey Jaguar was parked near it in a space labeled DR. FARMER. Remembering Drake's resentment, Craig smiled. Farmer, no doubt, had earned his rewards.

The receptionist asked if she could help him.

"Professor Harper's expecting me," Craig told her.

A quarter of an hour later, he tapped on a door with a neat sign reading DR. R. FARMER. A voice called, "Come in," and he did so, closing the door behind him.

Farmer was a short, stout, amiable-looking man of about fifty. His hair was receding and he wore glasses with dark rims.

"Mr. Craig?" he said. "The professor said you wanted to see me."

Craig nodded. "If you can spare a minute."

"Certainly." Farmer smiled. "What's it about?"

"The people who worked on the Mantons report."

There was a distinct pause before the scientist said, "Oh." His reluctance to discuss his former staff was clear. However, the Institute's head had instructed him to tell Craig anything he knew within reason and he could hardly refuse.

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"Instead of sacking all four of them, why didn't you call in somebody to find out which of them was guilty?" Craig asked.

"There wasn't time. Mantons was demanding that we take action immediately and Professor Harper said that if none of them owned up they'd all have to go." Dr. Farmer stirred uncomfortably. "I don't think I've ever disliked doing anything in my life as much as I did dismissing them. Miss York and Timothy had been here for years."

Craig believed him. It couldn't have been an easy decision for a man who, according to Joan York and Alison, had always been pleasant to work for. "Who do you think sold the report to the *Globe?*" he asked.

"I don't know," Farmer replied. "I don't like to think any of them would, but it must have been one of them."

"And Timothy was the only one with keys," Craig said.

The scientist nodded.

They talked for a little longer, and on his way out Craig stopped to have a word with the porter. Then he got back into his car and drove across London to his office.

It was a week later. Nowadays Craig did less surveillance work than he had when he was in the police, but this evening he ate a chow mein in a Chinese restaurant near his flat and set out on the old familiar routine. The police reckoned that a round-the-clock watch on a suspect took a team—he had to manage as best he could on his own.

At eight o'clock, he was parked at the side of a quiet suburban road, the car's stereo playing a tape of Cole Porter tunes very quietly. It was dark and a light drizzle had been falling for the last hour and a half. Craig had been there an hour, watching a house fifty yards farther along on the other side of the road. So far no one had come out, but a light was burning in an upstairs room. The subject was inside, his car parked outside the house where he had parked it when he came home forty minutes ago. Maybe he wouldn't go out tonight.

The tape ended. As Craig leaned forward to press the eject button, the front door of the house opened and a broad beam of light shone across the road. A man came out, hunched against the weather. Raindrops glistened in the light. Then the door closed behind the man and it was extinguished.

There was a streetlamp forty yards beyond the house. Craig

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watched the man get into the car and drive off. When it had gone a hundred yards, he started the Sprint and followed it.

The man drove through brightly lit streets and quiet residential roads for several miles. Then he turned onto the motorway. The traffic was fairly heavy and moving fast, but the road was well lit and Craig had no difficulty keeping the other car in sight.

Two junctions slid past. At the third the man turned off the motorway and headed into the outskirts of a large town. After five minutes, he turned into the parking area beside a low building with a neon sign, VAN ASHWELL'S CLUB. Craig followed him in and parked thirty yards away. He knew the place, he had been in a team that had arrested two villains here four years ago. It was a respectable nightclub and casino, and there was nothing wrong with it if you didn't mind cuisine with little imagination beyond prawn cocktails and steaks and losing your hard-earned money on the turn of a wheel or the mechanics of a one-armed bandit. Craig could think of better ways to spend his. When he had any.

The other driver got out of his car and strode off, making for the casino entrance like a man who couldn't wait to get to the tables. Craig gave him three minutes, then followed him.

The door opened into a small lobby presided over by a very large bouncer and a girl in evening dress sitting behind a small table. The bouncer's nose had been broken at some time and badly set, so that it gave a savage twist to his face. The other man had disappeared.

The girl gave Craig a brilliant professional smile that stopped short of her eyes. "Good evening, sir," she said. She was young and pretty and wearing a lot of makeup.

"A man came in two or three minutes ago," Craig explained. He was holding his wallet in his left hand and he showed it to her. "He dropped this in the car park. Is it all right if I go in and give it to him?"

The bouncer moved a couple of feet sideways to block his way to the inner door.

"I'm afraid only members can go into the casino, sir," the girl said. "It's a strict rule."

"It'll only take a minute," Craig protested.

"Give it ter me an' I'll see 'e gets it," the bouncer told him. His voice sounded thick, as if he couldn't breathe properly through his misshapen nose.

Craig smiled sweetly. "Sorry, I'd rather give it to him myself."

"Then you're going to 'ave a long wait, mate." The bouncer moved

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a yard or so away from the wall toward Craig. His expression hadn't changed.

"Okay," Craig agreed. "I'll wait outside, then." He turned back to the girl. "Could you get a message to him? I'll be by his car."

The girl looked at the bouncer. "Can you, Trev?"

The man eyed Craig for a moment, then nodded.

Craig went outside and waited in the shadows near the door. The minutes passed slowly. It was raining harder now and drops fell from the gutter onto Craig's unprotected head. He knew his quarry might say he hadn't dropped anything and refuse to come out. On the other hand, he might be nervous and come to see what it was all about. Or he might just be curious.

After ten minutes, the door opened and he came out, glanced around briefly, and made straight for his car. He was bending over to unlock the driver's door when Craig came up behind him and said quietly, "Good evening, Dr. Farmer."

For a moment the scientist was shocked into stillness. Then he turned.

"You again. Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name's Craig. I'm an inquiry agent. How much did you lose this evening?"

"I can't see that's any concern of yours. I've settled what I owed."

"Yes, you have, haven't you? There can't be much of the *Globe*'s money left."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Farmer blustered.

"People always say that when they're found out," Craig said. "When I was in the police we heard it all the time."

The scientist seemed to shrink visibly and he gripped the Jaguar's door. "What do you want?"

"Shall we get in and talk in the dry?" Craig suggested.

Farmer slumped into the driving seat. Craig walked round the car and got in beside him. "You sacked four people to cover up what you'd done," he said.

"I told you—I didn't want to sack them. The professor insisted."

"That's not what he says. According to him, it was your idea. He only knew about it afterward."

Farmer appeared to have sunk into a deep lethargy. It was as if he no longer cared. "How did you find out?" he asked.

They were the words Drake had said Joan York had used, Craig thought. Only in her case they hadn't meant anything. "Three of the

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people you sacked said it wasn't like you," he replied. "It wasn't necessary, either. The Institute could have called in somebody like me to find out who'd leaked the report, but you didn't dare have that. So you sacked those four to emphasize that one of them had done it.

"I found out it was a man. That seemed to narrow it down to Timothy or Drake. It looked as if the report must have been copied after working hours, and Timothy admitted he was the only one who had keys to the department and the filing cabinet in his office. But I couldn't see why he should have duplicated his copy when he knew it could be identified and he didn't take you the other two until Monday morning. You hoped that by using his copy you'd focus suspicion on his section and divert it from you.

"When Timothy said he was the only one who had keys, he meant the only one of those four—we weren't talking about other people. But the professor confirmed you both did and that you often worked late after most people had gone. I was beginning to take more interest in you. You had a nearly new Jag and you lived in a nice house. I started asking questions. I found out you were a gambling addict, that you'd been losing heavily, and that there'd been four court judgments against you you'd settled a fortnight ago. Just after the *Globe* bought the Balnay report."

"You can't prove I took it," Farmer said. He sounded as if he didn't really believe it himself. "The *Globe* won't say who sold it to them."

"I wouldn't bet on it," Craig told him, making no attempt to keep the contempt he felt out of his voice. "But I don't have to prove it. Those four will go to an industrial tribunal and it will all come out."

Almost in a whisper, Farmer asked, "What do you want me to do?"

"Let me have your written confession."

"What will you do with it?"

"Take it to Professor Harper. What he does with it is up to him. If you're lucky, he'll be too anxious to preserve the Institute's good name to go to the police." And if Farmer *wasn't* lucky, Craig thought, the professor would do everything he could to nail to the ground the man who had sullied that reputation.

That was a chance Farmer had to take.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

CLARK HOWARD

George leaped upright and with his feet turned the board so that it was diagonally facing the beach in the path of the wave. In his peripheral vision, he saw Nicky do the same thing. Then both of them were being lifted and carried like feathers on the wind as the swell of ocean rolled, shifted to the right, and rolled some more, taking them back where they belonged. Knees bent, bodies arched, arms akimbo, hearts pounding, faces glowing with the thrill of it, they rode the ocean . . .

CHALLENGE THE WIDOW-MAKER

by CLARK HOWARD

They buried old Terangi in a small country cemetery several miles below the crater of Kaneakala volcano. It was a simple funeral. Most of Terangi's neighbors made the drive up-mountain from Lahaina Town to attend, and a few of his fellow merchants who had small stores near Terangi's surfboard shop on the waterfront also attended. Because there were no other family members, Terangi's widow, Marama, was escorted to the services by George Hill, her late husband's sole employee, who was like a son to them. George had been with Terangi when the massive heart attack struck. They had been sanding separate ends of a new competition board Terangi was making for one of the Maui surfers to use in the next big North Shore finals on Oahu.

When the services were over and the other mourners had left, Marama leaned her head against George's arm. "Life will seem very strange without him, Keoki," she said, using the Polynesian form of George.

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"Yes, it will," George replied, just as quietly. "I hate to think what my life would have been like if it hadn't been for him. And you."

"You have been a great comfort to us, Keoki," she assured him. "You'll stay on and run the shop, won't you?"

"Yes." George shrugged. "I wouldn't know how to do anything else. All I've ever been was a soldier, a convict, and a surfboard maker."

"And a son," Marama reminded him, squeezing his arm. "You've been a son to two lonely people."

As they walked away from Terangi's grave, George noticed that not all the mourners had gone. A solitary figure stood well back at the edge of the cemetery, watching. Wearing a flowered Hawaiian shirt, his hands shoved into his pants pockets, he was a once-husky islander who had gone to fat. In one corner of his mouth was an ever-present toothpick. His name was Charley Kula. He was George Hill's parole officer from Oahu.

George drove Marama back down-mountain in Terangi's old Plymouth, which he supposed would now become his because Marama had never learned to drive. George had a lot on his mind at the moment. He was wondering how life was going to be without Terangi's wise counseling. He was wondering whether he could run the surfboard shop by himself. And he was wondering what was on Charley Kula's mind. In the rearview mirror he could see Kula following them down-mountain in the white state-owned pool car he used when he was on Maui. Kula was, in George's opinion, exactly what old Terangi had called him in private for years: a *haahaa na mea kino me ka hanu ola*. Literally translated, it meant a low creature, unworthy of a name.

George had been under Charley Kula's thumb for five years, living with the constant threat of being returned to Oahu Prison on the whim of an unfavorable monthly report. For five years George had loaned Kula money—twenty dollars here, twenty dollars there—money that was never paid back; or given him free surfboards for his supervisor's kids; or fixed him up with one of the *wahines* from the Cloud Nine Massage Parlor, at George's expense; or bought his dinner, his lunch, his breakfast, his haircuts, his shoeshines. When Kula came over from Oahu once a month, George always paid for one thing or another.

"Never mind," Terangi had always counseled him, "keep your *hu'ihu'i* [your cool]. Don't let a robber like him upset you. Be happy. Take one of the boards and go surf for an hour."

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For five years George had worked off his anger out on the waves. For five years he had kept his *hū'ihu'i*. But he had not been happy about it.

When George and Marama got back to Lahaina Town, to the little frame house on Lani Street where Terangi and Marama had lived for forty years, the ladies of the neighborhood were there with dishes of food and doses of comfort, so George only stayed a little while before telling Marama he was going to the shop for a couple of hours.

Then he left to go see what Charley Kula wanted.

Kula was in the bar of the old Missionary Inn, sipping a gin-and-tonic around his toothpick, shooting the breeze with the bartender. When George came in, he moved to a back table, taking his drink with him.

"Aloha, Georgie," he said with a smile. George sat down and a bored cocktail waitress in a sarong came over to take his order.

"Just a Coke," George said.

"I'll have another gin-and-tonic," Kula added. Then to George, he said, "Listen, have something stronger if you want it. I know how much you liked the old man."

George shook his head. "Just a Coke," he repeated. He remembered Terangi's words from the very first day of his parole: *Never let him get anything on you. Never break the rules, even if he tells you it's okay.* Parolees weren't allowed to drink alcoholic beverages.

"I guess the old lady wants you to stay on and run the shop, huh?" Kula asked when the waitress left.

"Yes."

"There's no other family, is there? They all died in that car wreck, didn't they?"

"Yes. I mean no, there's no other family."

"Well, that leaves you pretty well fixed, I guess. I mean, the shop will be all yours someday, won't it?"

"I suppose."

"Lucky day for you when old Terangi helped you make parole and gave you a job in his shop."

"Yes. Lucky day."

The waitress brought their drinks and George paid for them. Kula sat back and patted his ample belly with both hands. "You know, what happened to old Terangi makes a man realize just how short life is. A man's a fool if he don't make the most of the time he's got left. Take me, for instance. Next month's my birthday. I'll be fifty-

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five. That makes me eligible for early retirement. Know what I'd like to do? Buy a little corn farm in Kansas."

George looked at him incredulously and Kula chuckled. "Yeah, I know that's funny. Probably half the people in Kansas would like to come here to retire, and I want to go back there." He leaned forward on his elbows. "But I'm sick of the islands. I'd like to get up in the mornings and know I can hop in my car and drive more than thirty miles without running into the ocean. I want to live someplace where they have seasons, not the same boring perfect weather all the time."

"But why a corn farm?" George asked.

"I like to grow things," Kula said, taking the toothpick out of his mouth for the first time. "I've got a little garden at home right now. Tomatoes, radishes, carrots. But you need a field for corn—all I've got is the patio of my bachelor apartment. I get this realty catalogue every month. It's got a section on rural properties, with photographs, in color. I'll tell you something: a field of growing corn is a real pretty sight." Kula sat back again, taking a sip of his drink. "Only thing is, it takes a hefty down payment to buy a decent-sized farm in Kansas."

George sat back, too, and drank some of his Coke. "What's on your mind, Mr. Kula?"

The parole officer smiled. "Know what I like about you, Georgie? You cooperate. You always cooperate." The smile faded and the voice lowered. "I've got a parolee over on Oahu named Nicky Dade. Did five for burglary. Young guy, mid-twenties, real hip—he's a surfer, like you. The kid's old man was a locksmith. Nicky can pick damn near any lock there is."

George nodded. "So?"

"So there's a wholesale-costume-jewelry merchant on Oahu that gets a shipment of pearls from Hong Kong the first of every month. They're supposed to be fake, but they're not, they're *real*—the kind divers bring up from the ocean. Nobody knows they're real, of course—everybody assumes they're fake because the business is set up as a costume-jewelry company. It's a perfect cover. The guy doesn't have to pay a big insurance premium, doesn't have to have fancy security at his offices. I mean, who's going to steal a few hundred bucks' worth of fake pearls, right?" Kula sat forward again and his voice became even lower. "This guy brings in between a half and three-quarters of a million dollars' worth every month and nobody's the wiser. I only found out about it by accident, from this guy

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I know who works for the air-courier service that brings the stuff from Hong Kong."

"What's the point?" George asked.

"The point is that my boy Nicky can pick the locks to this guy's offices *and* his safe."

"Sounds like your boy Nicky's heading for trouble."

"Not at all," Kula said emphatically. "It's a walk-in, walk-out job, sixty minutes from start to finish. It's all set to go on the first of the month. All I have to do is find my boy Nicky a partner. A helper. Nothing heavy—a bag holder, lookout man, that sort of thing. Very easy work."

"Why don't you do it yourself if it's so easy?" George asked flatly.

"Me?" Kula said. There seemed to be genuine surprise in his expression. "Hell, Georgie, I couldn't do a thing like that. I'm no thief."

"Neither am I," George reminded him. "I did time for manslaughter, remember?"

Kula's eyes narrowed a fraction. "Like I said, Georgie, I like you because I figure you always cooperate. But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I've been wrong writing good parole reports on you all these years."

Sighing quietly, George looked away for a moment. There was hurt in his eyes, and helplessness. Presently he looked back and said, "No, Mr. Kula, you aren't wrong. What do you want me to do?"

Charley Kula smiled.

Two days later, the girl came into his shop. She had what islanders called "mixed-up blood," and it was obvious from her appearance: the brown hair of the Portuguese, the blue eyes of the *keokeos* (whites), the flat lips of the Tahitians, the wide nostrils of the Filipinos, and the long body of the Spaniards. She was almost pretty.

"Hi. You Georgie?" she asked.

"I'm George," he replied.

"I'm Mileka. Nicky's friend. He wants to see you."

"I'm right here," George said. He went on waxing the competition board he was working on.

"Not here," Mileka said. "Nicky doesn't talk business in rooms, only on beaches. He got sent to prison because of a microphone in a motel room." She jerked her head toward the ocean. "He's out surfing."

George thought about it for a moment, then put the board aside and reached under the counter for a printed sign that read: BACK IN

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TEN MINUTES. Terangi had used a felt-tip marker to cross out IN TEN MINUTES and in its place had hand-lettered SOON.

"Let's go," George said, putting the sign in the door.

He and the girl walked down Front Street a couple of blocks, then cut over to where the beach began. Neither of them tried to make conversation. George was pushing thirty-six and the girl couldn't have been more than twenty, so each assumed they had nothing to say to the other. When they reached the sand, both took off their sandals and left them on the curb with a dozen other pairs. Then they walked along the beach, up away from the water, until they came to a couple of towels with a beach bag on them.

"Nicky's out there." The girl pointed to a figure lying flat on a surfboard on the water fifty yards out, waiting for a swell. As George looked seaward, Mileka dropped her shorts onto one of the towels and pulled her polo shirt over her head. When George looked back, she was stretched out on the towel in a yellow French-cut bikini that made her tanned body look like warm caramel. Sun bunny, George thought derisively.

He waited for five minutes until the figure on the board caught a soft wave and stood up to surf back onto the beach. As the surfer walked toward him, George saw that he was a typical young white islander: blond, golden-tanned, supple, muscular, handsome, confident. Like I used to be, George thought before he could help himself.

"Hi, I'm Nicky Dade," the young man said, not offering to shake hands.

"George Hill," said George.

"I thought we ought to meet once before the job," Nicky said easily. "I guess Kula told you it's a real piece of cake. All you'll really have to do is what I tell you to. I thought we ought to have a look at each other, but Kula says you're okay so that's good enough for me."

"He told me you were okay, too," George countered. He didn't like being talked to as if he were a flunky.

"Of course I'm okay," Nicky retorted, annoyed. "It's my job, man. I'm the one that's doing it. Of course I'm okay."

"Of course."

Nicky stuck his surfboard upright in the sand. It was, George observed, one of the most expensive factory-made boards.

"Kula tells me you surf," Nicky said, seeming to get over his pique as quickly as it came.

"Yes."

"A little old for it, aren't you?"

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"I do it anyway," George told him. He noticed that Mileka was leaning up on her elbows, looking curiously at him.

"Maybe we can go out together sometime," Nicky suggested, bobbing his head at the water. "Early in the morning, before you open your shop."

"I don't surf in the harbor," George said. He didn't even try to keep the disdain out of his voice.

"That right?" Nicky said, with a trace of amusement. "Where do you surf?"

"Kaanapali," said George.

Nicky frowned slightly. "*You* surf Kaanapali?"

"I surf Kaanapali."

"At your age?"

"At my age." George could feel himself blush. He wished the girl wasn't there. Or at least that she wasn't looking at him. He forced himself to smile. "The waves aren't big at Kaanapali, but they're tricky. Harbor surfing's too tame for me. Look, I've got to get back to my shop. You can find me there whenever you want me."

He knew their eyes followed him all the way off the beach.

At noon the next day, Marama, as usual, brought George his lunch, as she had always done for Terangi and him. "Couple of nice *opakapaka* sandwiches today," she said. George went into the bathroom at the back of the shop and washed his hands. When he came back out, Marama had his lunch set out on the desk behind the counter. As he started to eat, Mileka came in. Marama got up to leave. "I've got marketing to do, Keoki. Don't be late for supper."

After Marama left, Mileka raised her eyebrows inquiringly. "Keoki?"

"Polynesian for George," he said. "You've got Poly blood—don't you know the dialect?"

"If I spoke the language of every kind of blood *I've* got in me, man, I'd be—what do you call it?—multi-lingual. I'm not real big on being a native girl. What's that you're eating?"

"*Opakapaka*. Pink snapper. Want some?"

"No, thanks. I'm strictly a hamburger-and-fries person. Listen, the reason I'm here is that Nicky wants to surf Kaanapali with you. He wants to know if tomorrow morning's okay."

"I'm too busy," George said. "I'm all alone in the shop now and I'm getting behind in the work." He saw that she had pursed her lips and was nodding knowingly.

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"Nicky said you were probably all talk. I'll tell him you can't make it."

As she started to leave, George said, "Wait a minute. Tell him I'll be at Black Rock at daybreak."

"I'll tell him," she said, a little smugly. Walking out, she looked back over her shoulder. " 'Bye, *Keoki.*"

At sunrise, George was sitting on the beach at the foot of Black Rock, a dark outcropping of lava rock that stood eighty feet high and jutted into the sea like a driven fist, dividing the long, beautiful beach into two lengths. Legend had it that Pele, the ancient fire goddess, had built the rock as a throne for herself. Terangi and Marama believed the story, so George believed it, too. As he sat on the sand, a thick beach towel around his shoulders for warmth, his surfboard resting familiarly between his legs, he wasn't afraid of the shadows of the rock that seemed to shift and adjust as if they had life, or of the eerie noises the wind made as it dervished its way through the throne's crags and crevices.

The sun rose at the edge of Lanai, ten miles away on the horizon, and in an instant sent warm yellow light across the dark water, changing its surface from black to an azure blue that perfectly matched the lightening sky above it. George heard a whistle and turned to see Nicky Dade and Mileka walking down the beach toward him. He rose and was pulling his sweatshirt off over his head as they came up.

"Hello, Keoki," Mileka said pertly. George ignored her.

"These waves look kind of soft to me," Nicky said.

"Like I told you, they're not big but they're tricky." George looked at him. "You a wave counter?"

"What do you mean?"

"On this side of the island, every ninth wave is a good one. So we wait here on the beach for a good one to break, then we start out, counting the incoming waves as we go. When the ninth one is about to come in, we get up and go with it. Clear?"

"Yeah, sure," Nicky said. "Where'd you learn all that?"

"Here and there."

As they waited, Nicky studied George's board. It was a handmade, tapered, hollow board ten feet long and eighteen inches wide, with a skeg, or stabilizing fin, near its back. Etched in a curve across the upper front were the words CHALLENGE THE WIDOW-MAKER.

"What's that mean?" Mileka asked, seeing the inscription.

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"The widow-maker is what the old merchant seamen used to call the ocean. The man who helped me make this board said every time a person goes out to ride the water on a piece of wood, that person is challenging the widow-maker. He wanted me to remember that, so he put it on the board." At that moment a good wave broke in the surf and George turned to Nicky. "Ready?"

"Ready, man."

"Let's go."

They walked into the water until they were chest-deep, then belly-flopped onto their boards and began paddling seaward. A low wave rolled in and they pushed easily through it. "That's number one!" George shouted. They kept paddling. Twenty yards, thirty. Another wave rolled in. "Number two!" Fifty yards, sixty. A third wave, perceptibly higher. "Three!"

They paddled in as straight a line as the sea would allow, their bodies flat on the narrow boards, their hands moving rapidly, their faces raised to the mass of water confronting them. In that juxtaposition, their relationship to the ocean was perilous and unpredictable, but at the same time almost carnal. Behind them, the safety of land grew farther and farther away. Ahead of them, the waves grew higher and began rolling and twisting as, far beneath the surface, the water encountered deep reefs and sandbars.

"Number six!"

One hundred eighty yards, one ninety.

Arm, shoulder, and neck muscles began to burn as if raw rope had been pulled across them.

"Seven!"

Two hundred ten yards. Two twenty.

The throat and groin began to react now, tightening, tensing, tickling oddly.

"Eight—!"

Two hundred and fifty yards away from the land, a six-foot wall of water rolled toward them.

"Number nine coming up!" George shouted. He leaped upright and with his feet turned the board so that it was diagonally facing the beach in the path of the wave. In his peripheral vision, he saw Nicky do the same thing. Then both of them were being lifted and carried like feathers on the wind as the swell of ocean rolled, shifted to the right, and rolled some more, taking them back where they belonged. Knees bent, bodies arched, arms akimbo, hearts pounding,

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faces glowing with the thrill of it, they rode the ocean. It was exhilarating.

When their boards hit sand, they leaped off and grabbed them up, then stood panting and smiling. They had come as close as any mortal ever comes to walking on water.

"Man, I see what you mean about tricky!" Nicky exclaimed as they walked back to where Mileka waited. "But I did all right, didn't I!" It was a boast more than a question.

"You did okay," George allowed. "Good thing the wave wasn't any higher."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure you could have handled a higher swell."

"Oh, yeah? Could you have?"

"Sure, I handle them all the time," George replied confidently. He noticed that Mileka was taking in every word.

"Oh, yeah? Where at?" Nicky demanded.

"Kahana," George said. "The other side of Black Rock."

"Okay, let's surf there tomorrow," Nicky said.

"Look, I've got a business to run."

"You chicken?" Nicky taunted. "Afraid I'll show you up?"

George didn't have to look at Mileka to know she was again appraising him. What the hell do you care? he asked himself. She's just another sun bunny—Lahaina Town was crawling with them. Nevertheless, he said, "Okay. Kahana tomorrow at sunrise."

As George walked away, he heard Nicky ask, "Did I look better than him out there?"

And he heard Mileka reply, "You both looked about the same to me."

George couldn't help smiling.

That night George met Nicky and Charley Kula at a small cafe in Wailea. Mileka was with Nicky, but he sent her to play the pinball machines while the men talked.

"You two getting acquainted?" Kula asked, shifting a toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Yeah, we're surfing buddies now," Nicky said. Something in his tone told George that Nicky didn't like the fat parole officer any more than he did.

"What do you think of my boy Nicky?" Kula asked George.

"Great guy," George replied blandly.

"I knew you two'd get on." Kula leaned forward. "Speaking of

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business, I checked on the pearl shipment. It'll be in right on schedule Friday afternoon." He looked at Nicky. "You ready to go to work Friday night?"

"I'm ready," Nicky assured him.

"Good. Now, remember, you have to be in and out of the building before eleven o'clock—that's when the night watchman comes on duty. I'll be at my house all evening, so I'll be able to provide an alibi for either of you on the outside chance you need one—I'll say you were with me all evening, helping me in my garden. After the job, you bring the pearls directly to me, Nicky. I'll hang onto them until it's safe to approach a fence to buy the stuff."

"How long before we get any bread out of this?" Nicky wanted to know.

"You'll get your cut as soon as I make the sale. A month, probably. Georgie, I'll take care of you out of my share."

I can hardly wait, George thought. Just then a waiter brought their dinner and Nicky waved to Mileka to come join them. "I ordered you a steak and fries," he told her when she came over.

"Okay." She glanced at the plate that was set in front of George. Everyone had steak and fries except him. "What's that?" she asked.

"*Ahi,*" he said. When she frowned, he translated, "Yellowfin. It's a tuna."

"You ought to try steak sometime, Keoki," she said.

"Keoki?" Nicky asked, raising his eyebrows.

"That's his Polynesian name."

"Cute," Nicky said drily.

George felt himself turn red again. Silently he called Mileka a little bitch.

The next morning, George was waiting on Kahana beach when Nicky and Mileka got there.

"Hello, Keoki," Mileka teased at once.

"Hello, Mildred," he replied.

Nicky's mouth dropped open. "Mildred?"

"That's what Mileka means in English," George told him. He looked innocently at Mileka, who was glaring at him. "I asked my foster mother last night."

Nicky looked at her incredulously. "I don't believe it. Mildred?" After a moment, he laughed. "That's funny. Mildred!"

"Oh, shut up!" she snapped. "I thought you came here to surf."

Nicky was still laughing as he and George walked down to the

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water's edge. George looked over his shoulder at Mileka and smiled. She made an obscene gesture at him.

After a good wave broke, George and Nicky put their boards in the water and began paddling out, counting waves as they went. "Remember," George reminded him, "these aren't as tricky as the ones at Kaanapali, they don't twist as much, but they're higher. You'll need a tighter crouch to keep your balance."

"I know how to surf, man," Nicky said.

Okay, big shot, let's see, George thought. He began to paddle a little faster, to get farther out before the ninth wave swelled. Nicky increased his own paddling to keep up. By the time eight waves had rolled under them, they were nearly three hundred yards from shore. When number nine began to rise up in front of them, George yelled, "Looks like a ten-footer!"

Both of them stood and planted their feet firmly against the boards. Their arms extended like gulls spreading their wings. With the lift of the water, they turned, and as they felt themselves being lifted lightly with the swell they had a brief glimpse of Mileka, far away on the beach, standing with her hands on her hips, looking out at them.

Then they made the oblique shift to ride diagonally and she passed from their line of sight as they faced Kahana far to the right of where she stood. It *was* a ten-footer and it lifted them high and sped them along on its sheet of water as if it were frozen and they were city kids sliding on an icy sidewalk.

They rode in until the big wave broke, then maneuvered their boards into calmer water and coasted until it was shallow enough to jump off.

"Great! That was great!" Nicky exclaimed as they waded in. "Man, it can't get any better than that!"

"Sure it can," George said.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"At Kapalua," George told him. "Farther up the coast. There the waves are high *and* tricky."

"Let's go there, then," Nicky said at once. "Tomorrow."

George shrugged. "Why not?"

Mileka didn't say goodbye to George when she and Nicky left, but as they were walking away George heard Nicky ask, "How did I look out there?"

"You looked good," Mileka said. Then, after a moment she added, "But he looked better . . . "

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Early that afternoon, Mileka came into the surfboard shop. Marama had already been there and George was eating his lunch.

"Fish again?" she asked. "What is it this time?"

"*Ono,*" he said. "The fishermen call it 'wahoo.' It's a grey game fish."

"Do you eat fish all the time?"

"Yes. My foster father said if a man ate fish every day he'd become a better swimmer and surfer because he'd feel more at home in the ocean."

"Come on, you don't really believe that, do you?"

"Yes, I do." Her tone irritated him. "What are you doing here, anyway? Another message from Nicky?"

"No. Nicky's taking a nap." Now it was she who blushed slightly. "Look, I came to say I'm sorry. About the name business, teasing you like I was doing. I didn't realize how you felt until you did the same thing to me. Then I realized how dumb it was. Sometimes I can be really stupid."

George grunted softly. "Can't we all."

"Anyway, I'm sorry."

"Forget it," he said. He pushed his plate toward her. "Want half a wahoo sandwich?" She hesitated. "Go on, try it, you might like it."

"Okay." Mileka sat and joined him for lunch. Presently she asked, "So how'd you get Poly foster parents? Did they adopt you?"

"Kind of." George turned to gaze out the window, across Front Street at the harbor.

"Maybe I shouldn't have asked," she said when he didn't elaborate.

George shrugged. "It's no secret, really. Thirteen years ago I was in the Army, stationed at Fort Shafter over on Oahu. I loved the Army—I was going to be a thirty-year man. To me it was the perfect life: soldier all week, drink beer, surf, and get laid every weekend. Except that one weekend it didn't quite work out that way. Four of us were coming back from surfing the north shore and we'd had a little too much to drink. We were cruising along the Nimitz Highway in a convertible one of the guys owned, when he lost control of the car, crossed the center line, and crashed head-on into an oncoming car.

"A Hawaiian couple and their two children were killed. My three buddies were killed, too. Seven dead—and I survived. I guess they wanted to make an example out of me as a warning to other servicemen stationed on the island, so they indicted me for manslaugh-

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ter. I hadn't been driving—but I couldn't prove it. The prosecution couldn't prove that I *had,* but there was enough doubt for the jury to convict me. I got fifteen years. I did eight and then Terangi and Marama helped me get out. They offered to provide me with a job and a place to live, and talked to the parole board. The parole board was very impressed by their interest—because the woman killed in the other car had been their daughter. I guess the board figured that if Terangi and Marama could forgive me, so could they. So five years ago I got out and came here to Maui. Terangi and Marama treated me like a son from the first day."

"They sound like wonderful people," Mileka said quietly.

"The best," George said.

Mileka studied him for a moment, then asked, "You don't like being in on this job Nicky's doing, do you?"

He shook his head. "I'm in it because of Kula. I don't want to go back to prison."

"Neither does Nicky." She took one of his hands and held it for a moment. "It'll be okay, Keoki," she said, and this time she spoke his Polynesian name naturally, without teasing. "Things will work out all right."

Yes, they would, George thought, nodding slightly.

Because he would *make* them work out all right.

Off Kapalua beach the next morning, George and Nicky paddled out a hundred yards, let a six-foot wave roll under them, and *then* began to count waves as they pushed farther out to sea. By the time they had counted eight waves, they were four hundred yards from the beach and facing a twelve-foot swell that was twisting forty degrees to their right. Getting upright on their boards, they turned almost fully around instead of diagonally, braced, crouched, sucked in air, and stopped breathing as the water lifted them like so much driftwood and seemed to hold them aloft for a split instant before rolling under them and rushing them back toward the beach. As their journey began, they breathed again, moving as if in flight, seemingly weightless, soaring along smoothly in defiance of magnetic gravity, marine physics, and mortal fear. For as long as they rode the crest of the wave, they were greater than other men.

When it was over, they waded back onto the beach and dropped to the sand, their chests heaving as the tension of the ride slowly gave way to the calm and safety of land.

"Man," said Nicky, "I never got a charge out of surfing like I get

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when I surf with you. There's something about the way you know the ocean—it's almost spooky." He propped up on one elbow and glanced at Mileka, who lay sunning farther up the beach. "Look, tonight's the job. When it's over, I figured we'd go our separate ways. But I been thinking. After the payoff, why don't we take a trip together? A surfing trip. We could head down to Peru for the season there, then move on to eastern Australia—hell, we could just follow the waves wherever they were breaking."

George sat up and hugged his knees. "What about her?" he asked, bobbing his chin at Mileka.

"I'll dump her," Nicky said without hesitation. "She's just a sun bunny—there'll be plenty like her wherever we go. Look, my share of tonight's job, and whatever Kula gives you for helping me, ought to last us a year, maybe a year and a half. And when it's gone, we'll find a way to get more. It's the chance of a lifetime, Georgie. What do you say, man?"

George seemed to ponder the proposition for a long moment, but presently he nodded and smiled at Nicky Dade. "Count me in."

"Far out!" Nicky all but cheered. Glancing toward Mileka again, he quickly lowered his voice. "Our little secret, right?"

George winked at him. "Right."

That evening, George flew to Oahu on the six o'clock Aloha flight. Nicky, who had gone over at noon, met him outside the airport in a rental car. When Nicky saw the look on George's face, he asked at once, "What's wrong, man?"

"We've got a problem," George said tensely. He handed Nicky the pink carbon of an airline ticket-confirmation from a Maui travel agency. It was a one-way ticket on the next morning's Continental flight to San Francisco in the name of Charles Kula. Looking at it, Nicky frowned.

"I don't understand."

"A friend of mine works in the travel agency," George said. "He knows Kula's my parole officer. This afternoon he mentioned to me that Kula was flying to the mainland tomorrow. I had my friend get me a copy of the ticket-confirmation, just to be sure." Nicky was now staring incredulously at George. "He's crossing us, man," George concluded simply. "It's a one-way ticket. He's taking the pearls and skipping."

Nicky's eyes scanned the confirmation again. "The dirty bastard," he whispered.

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"We'll have to call off the job," George said.

"No!" Nicky snapped. "We're not calling off nothing! I'm not giving up my surfing trip because of this bastard. Besides, this job is too cushy to call off. We'll just do to him what he was going to do to us: take the pearls and skip."

"No good," George vetoed. "He'd find a way to finger us without involving himself. He's the law, remember, and we're ex-cons. We'd better call it off."

"No! We're going to pull this job, man, just like we planned!" Nicky was staring out the windshield as if transfixed. "After we pull it, I'll figure out how to handle Mr. Charles Kula."

Nicky pulled away from the airport and drove into Honolulu. He parked on a side street off busy Kalakaua Avenue, where the costume-jewelry firm's office building was located. He and George walked around the area for an hour as Nicky briefed him. "Kalakaua's a big tourist street now: lots of shops, places to eat, lots of bars. There's usually people on the street until midnight or later. That's our building over there—"

George looked at a rather ordinary five-story structure that rose above a large drugstore. On one side of the drugstore was the entrance to an underground garage. Stretching beyond it was a string of souvenir shops: T-shirts, seashells, monkey-pod carvings, muumuus. Shoppers were everywhere.

Just before nine o'clock, Nicky said, "Okay, let's go."

They returned to the car and Nicky drove directly to the building and into the underground garage. It was only about one-third full, most of the building's employees having left for the day. Nicky parked as close as he could to a door marked: ELECTRICAL ROOM–AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. Opening the trunk of the car, he said, "Stay here. Bend over the trunk like you're looking for something. If anybody comes, drop the tire iron on the floor."

He walked away, pulling on a pair of gloves. George saw him take something from his pocket and briefly do something with the lock of the electrical-room door. The door opened almost at once and Nicky disappeared inside. Waiting at the trunk, George began to sweat.

In less than five minutes, Nicky was back. "Okay, the alarm's crossed," he said. He took a briefcase from the trunk. "Come on."

They rode the elevator from the garage up to three. No one got

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on with them and they encountered no one in the hall. "I can't believe there's a fortune in pearls just lying around this place," George said in a tense whisper.

"I told you, it's a cushy job," Nicky whispered back. "Now you see why I wouldn't call it off?" They reached a door with lettering on a frosted-glass pane that read PACIFIC-ORIENT COSTUME JEWELRY CO., LTD. "Watch the elevator indicator," Nicky instructed. "If the light comes on, nudge me and we'll both walk away from the door. Same thing if anyone comes out of another office." He immediately went to work on the door's lock.

The elevator light did not come on, and within a minute Nicky had the door open and was pulling George inside. Nicky had him wait just inside the door to listen for any sound from the hallway. He himself disappeared into one of the inner offices. George began to sweat again. At one point while he was standing there, he heard the sound of footsteps going by in the hall, and for a fleeting moment he thought he was going to be sick. He could challenge the widow-maker atop a rolling wave twice his height, but standing in a dark office at night was something else entirely.

Nicky seemed to take forever in the other room. Several times George heard vague metallic sounds and soft, muted tapping, but aside from that there was only silence. In the light from a nearby outside window, George could see a water cooler. It was sorely tempting as he felt his mouth go drier and drier, but he didn't want to leave his place at the door—somehow being next to the door seemed safer.

After what seemed like half the night, Nicky was suddenly back at his side. "Check the hall."

George opened the door a crack, using a handkerchief around the doorknob. The hall was clear. They left quickly, walking briskly back down to the elevator. Waiting there, Nicky grinned and shook the briefcase once. It sounded as if it was full of dried peas.

Back in the car, Nicky handed the briefcase to George. "I'm gonna drop you at a taxi stand. Go back out to the airport and wait for me around the Aloha ticket counter."

"Where are you going?"

"To see Kula." Nicky smiled coldly. "I want to be the one to tell him that his trip to San Francisco tomorrow has been canceled."

"You sure you know what you're doing?" George asked.

"I know exactly what I'm doing, man."

At the Royal Hawaiian taxi queue, Nicky pulled over and left the

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engine running. For just an instant, he seemed to hesitate. George knew at once what he was thinking.

"Don't worry," he said easily. "I'll be at the airport when you get there." He patted the briefcase. "And so will this."

Nicky nodded and drove off.

George had to wait in the airport four hours. Then he and Nicky had to wait another two hours for the first early-morning commuter flight back to Maui. The sun was just breaking on the ocean horizon as the twin-engine Otter set down on the airstrip at Kahului.

Both men had been silent during the flight. The night's events lay heavily between them. When Nicky had arrived back at the Honolulu airport, George had immediately asked, "What happened?"

"It's all settled with Kula," Nicky had replied tightly.

"What happened?" George asked again. Nicky glanced around. They were sitting alone in a corner of the passenger terminal.

"I bashed his double-crossing head in with a tire iron," Nicky told him coldly. "Then I put him in the trunk and drove out to Kaneana. You know where that is?"

George nodded. "It's out the Farrington Highway. Out where the underwater caves are."

"Right. I dumped him off the cliff right above the caves."

George swallowed. "Sharks feed in those caves."

"All the time," Nicky had confirmed in a whisper.

Now they were walking out of the Kahului airport toward the parking lot where George had left the old Plymouth that used to belong to Terangi. Nicky, carrying the briefcase, put it on his lap when he got in the car. As George started the engine, he said almost to himself, "Man, I've got an edge on. I need to unwind. After I drop you, I'm hitting the waves."

"I'll go with you," Nicky said. "We'll just stop by and pick up my board."

George shook his head. "Not today. I need a real challenge. I'm going out to Mokolea Point."

"Where's that?"

"It's out past where the highway ends. Out past Lipoa, where the lighthouse is."

"What's out there?"

"Pipelines," George said. "You ever surf a pipeline?"

Nicky shook his head. Pipelines were the twelve-to-eighteen-foot waves that rolled all the way over to form a moving channel of water

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through which a person could surf—if they were good enough. Fearless enough. Crazy enough.

"I'm going with you," Nicky said.

"You're not good enough to do a pipeline." George kept his tone clinical.

"Up yours," Nicky said. "I'm as good as you are. I'm going."

"Suit yourself," George told him.

They stopped at a little motel in Kahaina Town where Nicky and Mileka had been living. Nicky slipped in and got his board without waking her. Then George headed out Honoapiilani Highway and followed it past all the beaches they had surfed together—Kaanapali, Kahana, Kapalua—then on past Lipoa, where the lighthouse stood, and on around to where the paved highway ended and a dirt road began.

The road curved and wound around the natural lay of the craggy rock on which it rested, twisting and turning as if teasing the great ocean with its presence. George drove slowly, guiding the car carefully in tracks left by other vehicles. As on the plane, the two men did not talk. But George noticed that Nicky drummed his fingertips soundlessly on the briefcase that he again held on his lap.

Finally they arrived at a high point above the beach with a precarious path leading down to it. Beyond the beach, the ocean seemed angry. Great churning waves roiled up and rushed the shore as if in attack, not merely to erode but to shatter, to break apart this speck of rock that usurped its vastness.

Nicky put the briefcase of pearls under a blanket in the back seat and George locked the car, hiding the keys under a rock. Then the two men changed into their swim trunks and stood with their boards, looking out from the point.

"This is a *uhane lele,*" George said quietly. "It's a sacred place where the souls of the dead leap into their ancestral spirit land."

"You don't really believe that bullshit, do you?" Nicky asked derisively.

"Yes, I do," George replied, staring at the sea.

Shaking his head disdainfully, Nicky started down the steep path. Then he turned back, eyes suspicious, and said, "You first." Containing a knowing smile, George led the way down to the beach.

There they waited for the next pipeline to break, then plunged in and started paddling. Even though the sea was turbulent, moving against the tide wasn't difficult—the slender boards pierced the on-

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coming water with almost no resistance, needling through the waves or dipping over them as if without purpose, yet steadily leaving the land behind. They stayed close together, counting the waves. When the ninth one broke before them, Nicky yelled, "It's not the pipeline!"

"The *ninth* ninth wave is the pipeline!" George yelled back. "We've got a long way to go!" Nicky was looking at him in astonishment. "Want to turn back?" George challenged.

"Not me, man! I'm in all the way!"

They kept paddling. And counting. The second ninth wave broke. The third ninth wave. Periodically they rested, letting several waves go past without paddling through or over them, moving their hands only enough to keep from losing distance, then they began thrusting again. They passed the fourth ninth wave, the fifth, the sixth, and rested some more. Their upper arms burned, hot with fatigue. Their breath came in bursts.

"How far—out are we?" Nicky asked.

"About—eight hundred yards."

"God!"

"It'll be—a great ride!" George bolstered. "Probably—half a mile!"

The seventh ninth wave broke.

The eighth.

Then it came. The pipeline, rolling up in front of them as if the ocean had been tilted on edge. A sixteen-foot wave that looped back to embrace itself and form a tunnel of spiraling water that skimmed toward landfall with unbridled power.

"Waaaa-hoooo!" George yelled as he rose upright on his board. He caught only a brief glimpse of Nicky, just long enough to see the terror in his face, then the pipeline was upon him and he was in the vortex of it. An embryo in the womb of mother ocean.

George rode the great whirlpool all the way back to the beach. And he was right: it *was* a half-mile ride.

He sat on the bluff with a blanket around his shoulders for an hour, but Nicky never came out of the water. Score one more for the widow-maker, he thought.

He got the briefcase out of the car and opened it. The pearls lay spread inside like white caviar from some giant fish. They came from the ocean, they might as well go back to the ocean, he thought. Scooping up a handful, he flung them from the high bluff out into the water. Then he flung a second handful, a third. At some point, he began to laugh at what he was doing. It was a loud, uncontrollable

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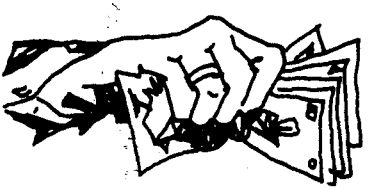
laugh, growing in volume with each new handful of pearls he threw back to the ocean. He kept throwing and laughing, throwing and laughing. Finally, the pearls were all gone and he put a couple of rocks in the briefcase and threw that off the edge, too, watching it sink into the water.

From the glove compartment, he took the airline ticket he had bought in Charley Kula's name, and tore it into tiny pieces, releasing the bits to the sea breeze. Then he got into Terangi's old Plymouth and drove back toward Lahaina Town to open his shop.



DETECTIVERSE

FUNNY BUSINESS

by DAVID MARTINDALE

Murphy the comic had a nightclub routine
That was vulgar and tasteless and often obscene.
His Don Rickles style made him enemies numerous—
Worse yet was the fact that the act wasn't humorous.
Like many, the bartender hated the comic,
So he slipped deadly poison in Murph's gin and tonic.
The funnyman died on the stage soon thereafter,
And all of the customers burst out with laughter.
They tittered, they giggled, they broke out in smiles,
They chuckled, they chortled, they rolled in the aisles.
But homicide cops, who were not so amused,
Found traces of strychnine the bartender used.
So topping the headline news the day after was
BARKEEP ARRESTED—CHARGED WITH MANSLAUGHTER.

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CLASSIFIED MARKET

ELLERY QUEEN—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $3.20 per word—payable in advance—($48.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be

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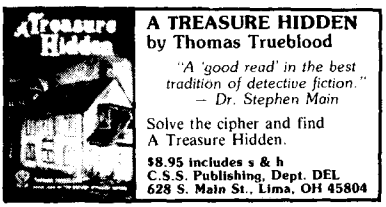
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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
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15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ _____

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 - $ _____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $ _____

(Example One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months $144.00 x .85 - $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

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(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

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11 stories—9 *NEW*

MICHAEL GILBERT (about Patrick Petrella)

GEORGE BAXT (about seeing Mommy killing Santa Claus)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)

BARBARA OWENS (about a Marty kind of guy)

ROBERT BARNARD (about happy release)

RICHARD BAUSCH (about the man who knew Belle Starr)

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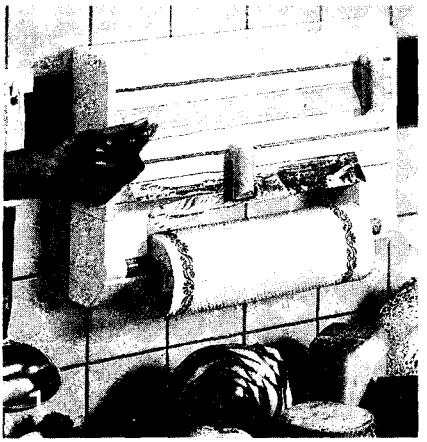

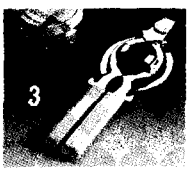

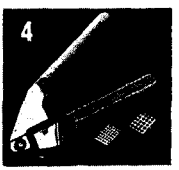

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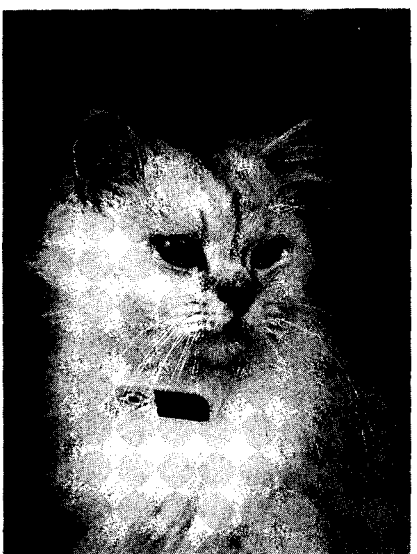

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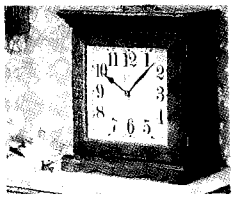
▼ A TIMELY SECRET



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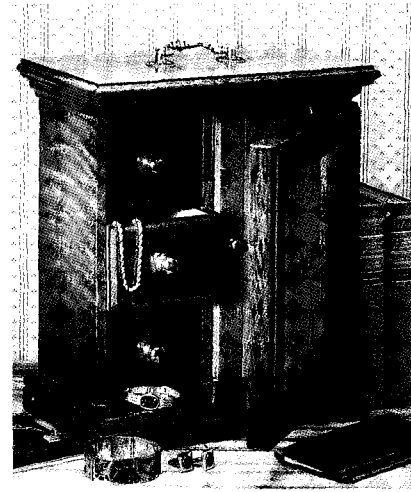

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TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 080 EL; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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